A £10 PRIZE FOR PUTTING A PICTURE TOGETHER. (See page 460)

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 384. FOR WEEK ENDING MAY 9TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

1896 PROCLAMATION.

Grand Pioneer Reduction Sale

By Messrs. F. HODGSON & SON, The Well-known Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds, will take effect on sight of this advertisement.

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	Each.		Each.
6ft. by 9ft., Reduced Sale Price	4/9	9ft. by 15ft., Reduced Sale Price	12/6
7½ft. by 9ft. ,, ,, ,,	5/11	12ft. by 12ft. ,, ,, ,,	12/9
9ft. by 9ft. ,, ,, ,,	7/6	12ft. by 13½ft. ,, ,, ,,	14/6
9ft. by 10½ft. ,, ,, ,,	8/6	12ft. by 15ft. ,, ,, ,,	15/9
9ft. by 12ft. ,, ,, ,,	9/6	12ft. by 18ft. ,, ,, ,,	19/6
10½ft. by 12ft. ,, ,, ,,	11/6	12ft. by 21ft. ,, ,, ,,	22/6

When ordering please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

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The Dowr. Lady Abercromby is pleased with the 'Prudential' Carpet she ordered."
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Lady Hunter Blair writes: "Will Messrs. F. Hodgson & Son send her another 'Prudential' Carpet, same as before, crimson and gold, dimensions, 9ft. by 10½ft. Cheque inclosed."

A Reversible "Prudential" Hearthrug (Reg)., to match above Carpets, sent for 1s. 6d. extra, size 2 yards long, and 1 yard wide.

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No. 19

May 9, 1896.

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EDITED BY ARTHUR PEARSON OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY

SHORT STORIES

No. 384.] For the Week ending May 9th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

THE QUEEN OF THE ROSES.

PIERRE DUBOURG, the Headsman of the Luxembourg! It was a name of horror, overtopping the terror of the Reign of Terror, when men revelled in the shedding of blood, and women worshipped the guillotine, whose effigy they wore as a sacred ornament, replacing the discarded crucifix.

Like the prison, raising its ominous roof within musket range of the graceful, ornamental palace of the Luxembourg, Pierre Dubourg boasted a history as instructive as it was terrible. Prominent as was its headsman among the frenzied actors in scenes of revolutionary massacre, memory of his personal injuries and of the merciless avengement of his wrongs have been buried in oblivion, while the gloomy dungeon of the Luxembourg, whence emerged hundreds of innocent martyrs to meet an ignominious death, is suffered to survive, the monument of a nation's tyrannical zeal.

* * *

Towards the declining hours of the monarchy there was held in the environs of the frontier town of Varennes a rustic festival, at which congregated the youth, beauty and *bourgeoisie* of that pretty bourg, famed for the loveliness of its female denizens. It was a communal jubilee given at the expense of the Government, still managed by the local authorities, who took good care that the royal bounty should afford an abundance of the fat of the land, inasmuch as the Vidame chanced to be a wine grower, his subordinate a publican, and the remainder of the municipal rulers, butchers, grocers and bakers. Consequently, large as was the assemblage of revellers, they could eat, drink and be merry at the expense of the Crown.

Prior to the actual commencement of festivities had occurred one of those provincial ceremonies held in high esteem by the peasantry of certain portions of France, and attended by the minor gentry of the bourgs adjacent to the scene of their celebration. Of remote origin, these festivals were ordinarily known as the "Crowning of Rose Queens," damsels selected by the Church and presented to the Lords of the Manor to be enthroned and revered in public by their admiring neighbours as the most dutiful, respectful, and virtuous of maidens attending their first communion during the current year.

With the crown of roses upon her head, a sceptre of witch-hazel in her hand and a virginal girdle binding her waist, the monarch ascended her throne, surrounded by a bodyguard of liveried youth, there to receive homage from her subjects, whose loyalty was to endure until the day whereon the Rose Queen condescended to bestow her hand in marriage upon some suitor with whom, as a preliminary favour, she condescended to divide the honours of her Coronation Day.

Deposited the crown of roses upon the brow of Marie Duchesne.

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There was a blast of deep toned trumpets as the Vidame of Varennes deposited the crown of roses upon the brow of Marie Duchesne, while the tall beadle of the suburban church of Ste. Claire, garbed in his feudal uniform, waved the banner of the Blessed Virgin over her bowed head. Neither cheers nor other outbursts of enthusiasm accompanied this mute but impressive proclamation of virtue's triumph, and a dignified silence reigned until the Curé of the parish, after delivering a eulogy upon the domestic life of the fair elect, completed her exaltation by a fervent benediction, designed to strengthen the temporary monarch in her moral progress through life.

Upon a grass mound surmounted by the Rose Queen's throne was placed a chair, still not upon a level with the royal seat. It stood at the right side of the presiding sovereign, and so that the head of the occupant would be upon a line with his regal mistress's shoulders. It was vacant, still upon it concentrated the glances of all the lads and lasses in attendance as they craned their necks in anxiety to catch the first glimpse of its intended occupant, conscience-keeper of their Queen.

Marie Duchesne was a maid of eighteen, the daughter of mine host of the "Golden Swan," a posting-house on the outskirts of the bourg, necessarily patronised by all the travellers crossing the frontier into German territory.

The girl was remarkably handsome, better educated than most of her class, cheerful, of winsome manners, amiable disposition, and austere piety.

The sole child of the Père Duchesne, Marie would be entitled to a handsome dowry, a temptation to mercenary suitors, while her striking beauty and modest demeanour attracted a horde of obsequious adorers. To gain her hand had been the object of all the marriageable youth of Varrenes, who now clustered round her throne, the decisive moment having arrived when an invitation for one among them to occupy the vacant chair would be public announcement as to the conqueror of her virgin heart.

"Whom doth her Majesty please to summon as guardian of her conscience—as minister of state?" said the Vidame, with the air of a lord chamberlain.

Marie Duchesne blushed until her cheeks corresponded in hue with the roses of her crown. She had been called upon to perform the first act of her sovereignty and to be her life's destiny. Recovering herself, Marie, with maidenly modesty, whispered into the Vidame's ear, and that worthy magistrate transferred the whisper to the stalwart beadle protecting the throne as would a captain of the royal guard.

"Pierre Dubourg!" announced the church dignitary, who had lain aside the banner and armed himself with a halberd, upon whose glittering blade were etched the armorial bearings of the Vidame.

The female revellers glanced at each other in astonishment, then turned up their dainty noses, and finally subsided into derisive giggles, evidently affected to cloak some internal vexation. On the other hand, no sooner had their male companions heard proclamation of the happy couple than they broke forth into a hearty ebullition of congratulation, clapping their hands, tossing up their holiday hats, shouting and cheering at the top of their lungs.

This spontaneous demonstration of common satisfaction endured for many minutes with augmenting ardour, during continuance of which a stalwart youth, who had been timidly ensconced upon the outskirts of the crowd, was seized by his immediate neighbours and borne uplifted in their arms to be deposited at the foot of the throne, where he knelt, as in duty bound, to pay open homage to his queen.

"Arise, Pierre, and take your seat," quoth Marie. Dubourg obeyed, and the cheers were renewed.

After cessation of this ovation the leader marshalled the joyous crowd into a decorous procession, assigning rollicking cavalier to blushing damsel, and male escort to feminine loveliness in accordance with his own ideas of rustic etiquette. Then, waving his halberd as a drum major manipulates his *baton*, he headed the long line of her subjects as they passed in review before the queen of a day and her companion for life.

Pierre Dubourg was the blacksmith of Varennes, whose smithy was located directly oppose Père Duchesne's postal inn. He was a good-natured, kind-hearted fellow, more remarkable for his massive frame and herculean strength than either good looks or alluring manner. Hence the villagers wondered how Marie Duchesne, the belle of Varennes, rich, refined and personally attractive, could have selected such a mate, when hundreds of handsome youths had sought her hand.

But Marie carried her reasons for this preference hidden within her breast. She had watched Dubourg daily and unseen while labouring at his forge; she had conversed with him in her father's presence when, after cessation of work at nightfall, he was a welcome guest within the private parlour of the roadside inn. Marie discovered him to be industrious, provident, well instructed, fond of learning, and of a retiring, docile temper. Consequently she had selected him without his knowledge to be her future husband, and none among her admirers were more astonished at the declaration of choice than Pierre Dubourg himself, whose lips had never spoken a word of love when in her presence.

The Sunday preceding Christmas was the day set apart for the solemnisation of Marie's marriage, and during the interval elapsing Pierre Dubourg laboured night and day to earn the money necessary to purchase a suitable bridal outfit. "Marie," he said to his betrothed one evening as he was about closing up his smithy, "I have gained a hundred gold louis, and to-morrow I will leave for Paris."

"What for, Pierre?" inquired his betrothed.

"To buy your trousseau, my love," returned Dubourg, somewhat proudly. "I will spend the whole of it on you."

"That's kind of you, Pierre," quoth the girl, after a moment of hesitation. "But I have money of my own, and would it not be better to save yours, which we may want after we are married, dear."

"But how will you get your trousseau?" inquired the smith, after considerable reflection.

"I will go to Paris and buy it," answered the girl.

"You, Marie? You, alone in Paris?" returned the lover.

"Why, yes, Pierre!" rejoined the bride elect. "I have never seen Paris, and can buy such articles as I want while seeing the sights. It will save your money, Pierre, and be the better for me, as you cannot know what a woman wants. So I had better go."

"But it will not do for you to go alone," urged Pierre. "Paris is dangerous for an unprotected girl."

"I will not be unprotected, Pierre," interrupted Marie, somewhat petulently; "besides, I am old enough to take care of myself, and know that I will."

"Suppose I should tell you not to go," interposed Pierre, vexed at his betrothed's pertinacity.

"Then, Pierre," said the young girl determinedly, her bright eyes flashing fire. "I shall go, and you shall never

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see me again. I have father's consent, and I have no need of yours, at least, not as yet."

Pierre Dubourg was abashed and quailed before the girl's exhibition of firmness. It was the only time that he had attempted suggestion of his implied authority and was ashamed at his decisive repulse.

"When will you return?" Pierre inquired after a prolonged pause, during which Marie scrutinised his countenance closely to catch, if possible, a reflex of his thoughts, for Dubourg was in evident tribulation.

"Within a month, Pierre, at the furthermost, although it is a long way to Paris," returned the girl unconcernedly. "Still, you must not fret yourself should I be detained a few days longer."

"You go by the malle-poste, then, to-morrow?"

"No; were that so, I would not go. Now, listen, Pierre, how fortunate I am. You have seen the carriage belonging to that nobleman who came from the Court at Paris, standing under father's shed? Well, it's going back again, and the gentleman says that I can ride in it. Won't that be nice, Pierre?"

The blacksmith, lost in amazement, recovered himself after a minute or so of meditation.

"Does the gentleman accompany you?" he asked with an effort, for jealousy commenced dawning upon his imagination. "That would not be right."

"Oh, no, it will be right," responded the girl assuringly. "I go alone, Pierre, with the coachman and the lacqueys in livery, since the Count stops with a friend at a château two leagues from here for a month or so."

"Who told you all this?"

"The Count told father before he left."

"He has gone away then?"

"Oh, yes. He went this morning in his carriage with its four fine horses and golden harness. It did look splendid, I can tell you. But it will come back to-night, and on the morrow I will start in it for Paris. You are not sorry I am going, Pierre, in such a style?"

"No, Marie," said the smith, the tone of his voice belying his words, "if it pleases you. Only my heart tells me that you will never come back. Is it so?"

"What nonsense, Pierre! I'm sure to come back."

"You swear that you will?"

"I swear that I will," repeated Marie solemnly, and then throwing her arms round her lover's neck, and bringing his lips to hers, implanted upon them a fervent kiss. Disengaging herself, Marie Duchesne tripped lightly and gleefully in the direction of her father's inn, leaving Pierre standing at his forge lost amid the bewilderment of conflicting emotions.

* * *

Six months had rolled by since Marie Duchesne departed from Varennes in all the vanity of a noble equipage with a pomp and ceremony worthy of a dame of Versailles. Four of these months were seasons of anguish and of lamentation to Pierre Dubourg, who marked the flight of time as the weary period of his betrothed's prolonged absence waxed longer and more unaccountable, with sighs and tears.

The simple-minded smith, unconscious of the artifices of a wicked world, placed full reliance in Marie's plighted word, and not a post chaise or lordly carriage rolled into the court-yard of the "Golden Eagle" unless undergoing keen inspection by his vigilant eyes, in the trust that it would restore to his arms one whom, by dint of unremittent mental contemplation, he had transformed into the divinity of his widowed heart. Pierre Dubourg loved Marie with an intensity of passion unknown to lovers in high society, and with a spirit of adoration elevating his idol beyond a mundane sphere. True, at the moment of her departure the artisan entertained no such exalted feelings; still, as in the loneliness of his situation he brooded over the prospects of a more congenial future, his affections concentrated until Marie appeared the solitary aim of his mortal existence.

Perplexed and wearied at his betrothed's protracted

Aroused by the noise of a vehicle approaching.

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"What do you want?" demanded the forest guard.

absence, Pierre Dubourg, nervous and anxious concerning the uncertainty of her fate, determined to solve the mystery by a journey to Paris. He disclosed his purpose to no one, not even to the Père Duchesne, who apparently interested himself slightly concerning his daughter's lengthened sojourn in the gay capital, then given over to libertines and *roués* attached to the court.

For three weeks Pierre Dubourg wandered through the streets of Paris in a vain search for Marie. He hunted the great city high and low, by night and day, until his limbs were fairly tired out with ceaseless promenades. He was upon the point of reluctantly relinquishing the search, when, wearied by an expiring effort, he seated himself upon a stone bench, placed against a garden wall surrounding an isolated villa upon the Cours de la Reine, the royal highway facing the Seine, and leading from the Tuilleries to the palace of Saint Cloud.

The disheartened, foot-sore and sorrow-stricken peasant, engrossed in meditation upon his untoward destiny, remained for hours in a species of stupor, when he was suddenly aroused from his reverie by the noise of a vehicle approaching the bench whereon he rested. The night was far advanced and somewhat dark, still, by the fading moonlight he was enabled to detect the outline of a lacquey who descended from the rear of the carriage, and seizing a tarnished metal knob projecting from the wall, extorted a deep-toned peal from a bell on the other side.

The sound of this alarm had scarcely died away before a ponderous, foliage-covered iron gate, almost concealed from view, turned upon its hinges to allow egress to a couple of servants, bearing flaming links extending at arm's length, who placed themselves beside the garden entrance in such a way as to render objects in the vicinity brilliantly visible.

Actuated by instinctive curiosity, Pierre Dubourg glanced at the vehicle, whose door had been opened by an obsequious footman to allow its occupant to descend, which proved to be a young woman. As she stepped upon the ground, a hood, with which which her face had been partially covered, fell back upon her shoulders, exposing her features to the full light of the links.

As he gazed upon the lady's face, Pierre was first amazed and then almost petrified. It was Marie Duchesne, whose features were too familiar to his memory not to be instantly identified. The lover was tempted to advance and throw himself into the arms of his betrothed. Still an unaccountable and irresistible force seemed to have paralysed his frame, riveting him, without power of motion, to where he stood. Impelled to uplift his voice and apprise her of his presence by calling her name, his tongue refused its office, and before he could recover from stupefaction, the lady passed within the garden gate. She was followed by her torch-bearing domestics, and the gate, swinging to behind them, interposed a barrier between Pierre and the vanished girl.

On the morrow Pierre Dubourg threaded his way with no little difficulty, being a stranger to the aristocratic faubourgs of the capital, to the scene of his previous night's adventure. Fortunately for him, a succession of mishaps and delays retarded his arrival before the foliaged gate until late in the afternoon, otherwise he would have found the tenants of the villa invisible to an ordinary visitor.

Pierre, discovering the metallic knob, gave a violent pull, causing a reverberating alarm. To this authoritative summons a gorgeously dressed *chasseur* responded, opening a small door inserted in the wall.

"What do you want?" demanded the forest guard sharply.

"To speak with the lady of this house," replied Pierre Dubourg, as he forced his way into the garden.

"You do not trespass thus," rejoined the *chasseur*, interposing his burly person to block Pierre's further passage. "Begone, beggar, or I'll kick you out."

"I have come to see the lady, and I will see her," replied Dubourg, with an air of serious determination.

"Out! I tell you, tramp!" ejaculated the domestic, and he seized Pierre firmly by the shoulders.

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"Hands off, and let me pass," said the peasant, as he disengaged himself from the *chasseur's* grasp.

"Out! out!" shouted the forester, as he again laid violent hands upon Pierre.

But the man, muscular as he was, had reckoned without his host. Pierre Dubourg, hardy from toil, agile from daily exercise, and the most skilful wrestler of Varennes, where men are born gymnasts, instantly closed with his liveried assailant, and before he was thoroughly aware of the folly of his rashness, the fellow was whirled into the air and dashed prostrate upon the ground with such violence as to extort an agonising howl of pain and anguish.

Attracted by noise of this turmoil a young female appeared at a window overlooking the entrance to the villa, and inquired in evident trepidation:

"François, what is the meaning of this disturbance?"

"It is I, Marie Duchesne; it is I, Pierre Dubourg!" shouted the provincial, assured at the girl's identity.

"What do you want with me, Pierre Dubourg?" demanded the young woman, recovering her composure.

"To speak a moment with you in private."

"François, admit the man."

The *chasseur*, aching in every bone from the violence of his fall, reluctantly obeyed the commands of a mistress he dared not offend, by leading the way into the villa and introducing the unwelcome visitor, after passing through several richly furnished apartments, into an exquisitely decorated boudoir.

Carelessly lounging upon a velvet-covered couch reclined Marie Duchesne, habited in a silken morning gown, trimmed with Flemish lace, her face pale and seemingly careworn, her hair falling in negligent tresses, and her eyes slightly devoid of lustre. She was indeed the ex-Queen of the Roses, but, alas, not the bright, etherial creature gleaming upon the day of coronation.

"Pierre Dubourg, your business with me?" commenced the girl, with a calmness and deliberate chilling the reviving passion of her visitor.

"I have hunted long for you, and now I have found you," responded the artisan while tear-drops oozed from beneath his eyelids. "I claim you for my bride."

"Pierre Dubourg," said the girl, with emphasis upon each word. "I chose you to be my intended husband of my own free will, and of my own free will I have discarded you. Let us not part in anger, for we shall never meet again."

"Never again!" repeated Pierre aghast.

"Never again," rejoined Marie, "our journey through life lies through different roads. Now depart."

"Depart!" ejaculated the smith. "Am I a dog to be driven from your sight. I will not depart!"

"You will!" uttered a deep-toned voice from the bottom of the boudoir, as the hangings were moved aside from a cabinet door to allow the entrance of a new actor upon the scene. "This lady has given a final answer. Your presence pollutes the atmosphere. Begone, sir!"

"And who are you, my cocksparrow, who dare order me from the possession of my own?" cried Pierre, hurling a glance of vindictive defiance at the speaker.

"I am the Count de Fersen, at your service," replied the intruder, a handsome man of commanding appearance, wearing an embroidered court dress, emblazoned with the cross of St. Louis. "Furthermore, I am that lady's protector——"

"Protector!" interrupted Pierre Dubourg, with an unearthly yell. "You have ruined her body and soul! Have now your just and well-earned reward."

With a sudden dash, Pierre threw himself upon the nobleman, and before the Count could comprehend his intention, dealt him a blow upon the cheek, sending him staggering across the room.

Marie Duchesne shrieked and swooned. The Count successfully recovered from the effects of the assault, and going to the table, whereon lay an unsheathed rapier, presented the weapon's point at Dubourg's breast. "I could slay you," said the Count, stamping his foot three times, "but this blade shall never be stained with a plebian's blood. Your punishment will come at the hands of my servants, fellows of your kind." As he spoke four stalwart valets filed into the boudoir, the herculean *chasseur* at their head.

"François," said the Count, "let this vagrant be flogged off my grounds. He has dared to strike your master."

* * * * *

Ejected from the villa and cast into the muddy roadway, humiliated, scourged, and covered with bleeding wounds, Pierre Dubourg knelt and swore eternal vengeance upon the aristocracy of France. On the morrow he departed for Varennes a heartbroken man. Three years passed away, and during that interim radical political changes had been wrought in France, whereby the power of the aristocracy was on the wane. One day a lumbering travelling coach occupied by a plainly

Presented the weapon's point at Dubourg's breast.

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dressed portly man, two handsome ladies and a couple of children drove up to Dubourg's smithy, as a horse had dropped a shoe. The coachman entered the shop to give orders to the smith.

Pierre Dubourg's keen eyes were at once fastened upon the man, and detected, despite his disguise, the features of his enemy—the Count de Fersen.

"Scoundrel!" growled Pierre, as he tossed aside the pretended coachman's wig and grasped him by the throat with the tenacity of a vice, "it is my turn now. I will not dash out your brains, for a smith's hammer shall not be defiled by the blood of an aristocrat. So, Count, I shall hand you and your companions over to the people that they may mete out the punishment deserved."

Through exercise of main strength Pierre Dubourg dragged his captive over the roadway to the "Golden Eagle," where were congregated loitering gossips and village notables. Summoning Père Duchesne to the inner door, the smith addressed him in a voice of thunder:

"Père Duchesne, behold the Count de Fersen, the lover of his queen, Marie Antoinette, and the moral murderer of your daughter, our Queen of the Roses."

"Down with the aristocrat!" shouted the villagers in a common chorus.

"And who are these in the carriage yonder for whom you, a peer of France, act as a coachman?" demanded Pierre Dubourg of his prisoner.

"The royal family of France," returned the Count, "whom I would serve in any capacity."

Grasped him by the throat with the tenacity of a vice.

"Then die with them on the scaffold," sneered the smith, "and remember that I will be there to see the will of the people done."

Pierre Dubourg was not false to his promise. During the Reign of Terror he became executioner of aristocrats confined in the various prisons, from the chief of which he derived his title, the Headsman of the Luxembourg.

Le Vier.

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An Averted Scandal.

"WELL, here we are at last!" said my travelling companion, as the train slackened speed and pulled up at the little station called Oak Grove.

"Yes, here we are at last," I replied ill-humouredly, as I gathered up my belongings, for the train was three hours behind time, having been kept waiting all that while in a siding, owing to the breakdown of a mineral train, which had completely blocked both lines. "Good-night—or rather, good-morning," I added, a little more graciously, as I alighted, "a safe and pleasant journey to you. Thank goodness I have reached my destination."

Some ten days before, I, junior partner in the firm of Martin Bros. and Son, had accepted a pressing invitation from my old college chum, Gus Thwaites, to spend at least a part of my vacation at his father's country house, "The Larches," near Oak Grove.

Mr. Thwaites, senior, and his comely and motherly wife, were noted for their hospitality, and for the charming young society which they loved to gather about them. Often before had I been a participator in these merry gatherings, and, nothing loth, had set out to renew the pleasant associations.

But the welcoming greetings were scarcely over, and our plans of amusement were still unsettled, as the expected guests had not yet all assembled, when I was recalled hastily to town, on affairs unnecessary to mention here. Gus took me down to the train in his own trap, and his last words were:

"It's a provoking shame, old fellow; but cut it as soon as you can, and I'll meet you whenever you say the word."

With this the train whizzed off, and I turned my thoughts to London, where I arrived in due time, and devoted myself to the unreasonable business emergency with such success, that on the fifth day I sent word to Gus to be ready to meet me by the 9.30 train.

And now the 9.30 had become the 12.30 and a little more, and, of course, my friend must have gone home in disgust long ago; and here was I at a country station, four miles from "The Larches," time nearly one o'clock in the morning, with the surrounding neighbourhood in slumber.

Of course, there was no chance of a conveyance of any kind, and no place to put up at till morning. There was nothing to be done but to "foot" it along the country road, which I accordingly set out to do.

It was not an unpleasant walk, in the cool, dewy, summer night, with the stars twinkling peacefully overhead; but I must confess to being rather weary, and heartily glad when I drew near to "The Larches," and beheld once more the comfortable residence of my friend, now wrapped in profoundest quiet.

Until this moment, the question of gaining entrance had not arisen in my mind. Accustomed as I was to living in London, where light and noise are continual by night as well as by day, I had not pictured to myself the intense silence and repose of a country home at midnight, and I involuntarily quailed at the thought of disturbing so peaceful a household.

However, unless I determined to pass the intervening hours in the summer-house, among the damp creepers and blossoms, the deed must be done. So, walking briskly along the long gravel paths, I was about to ascend the steps——

"Ur-r-r-r!"

I stopped. What was that?

"Ur-r-r-r!" and, with a mighty dash, on came a great dog, his hair bristling, and his teeth glistening ominously.

I retired in haste.

After running a little distance, I noticed that he did not follow me, though he still growled threateningly.

I paused for investigation, and then, hearing a smooth, sliding noise, and coupling it with the fact that he did not come after me, conjectured that he was probably fastened to a chain, thus allowing him only a certain range.

Assured of this, I ventured back. My supposition proved to be correct. His beat extended across the front of the house, and, if I could get round beyond him, and crawl upon the extreme end of the verandah, I might thus reach the door bell.

This I tried to do; but I had not counted upon the lateral sweep of his tether, and, almost before I was

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aware of it, he was again in most unpleasant proximity to me, and still uttering those deep growls.

"Dash it all!" I thought, "if only he would bark and rouse somebody, instead of keeping up those insane growls!"

But my objurgations had no effect on the dog, so I again retired—this time to consider.

After all, why wake the whole house by an alarm at this unearthly hour? I knew just where my room was—Gus and I had always occupied the south-eastern chamber in company; and I knew, too, how I could get in, as we used to of old, when returning from some boyish lark and wishing to gain our beds unperceived.

There was a tiny dressing-room with a window opening from this room, and beneath that was an old-fashioned bay-window, with a permanent trellis on one side. By the aid of this and of the water-pipe, it was easy work for a boy to "swarm up"—as we elegantly expressed it—to the top of the bay-window, and, once in the dressing-room, the way was clear.

True, I was somewhat heavier now than I was at that time, but I trusted that my superior agility—resulting from a long course of gymnastics—and also my intense desire to escape from my uncomfortable situation, would enable me to perform the feat.

So I circled the house in the rear, and, removing my superfluous clothing, fastened it to my shoulders, and began to climb.

After a few slips, and some giving way of the trellis, I stood on the roof of the bay-window, and found, to my great joy, that the dressing-room window was open, though the shutters were closed. It was not a very hard task to force these open, and, in a few minutes, I stood safely in the dressing-room.

Now to surprise Gus!

I opened the communicating door very softly, and peeped in.

The room was indistinctly visible in the soft, summer twilight, and I stopped a moment to reconnoitre.

There was the bed, evidently disturbed, but there was nobody in it; there were the familiar table, wardrobe, mirror, etc. But what were those things lying on a chair? A dim mass of white and parti-coloured drapery, for which I knew no name or use. Queer, wasn't it? And where was Gus?

I heard footsteps—that must be he. I had it; he had been roused at last by the dog, and had been on a tour of exploration. Why couldn't he have gone before, and saved me all this anxiety? Well, I'd give him a good scare, to pay him off.

Just as I came to this conclusion, the outer door of the bedroom slowly opened.

I was still peeping through the crack of my door, expecting to see the dishevelled figure of my friend, and enjoying a quiet chuckle at his prospective discomfiture. So, making the opening a little wider, I put out my head.

Lightning never moved faster than I whisked it back again.

Ye gods and little fishes! Had I suddenly gone insane? Instead of the somewhat robust form of my friend, in a hasty nocturnal attire, my eyes had rested upon a tall, slender, female figure, in a long rose-coloured gown, and with golden hair flowing far down its shoulders.

Visions of screams and hysterics and fainting-fits, and I know not what, flashed across my mind as I squeezed myself behind the door, scarcely daring to breathe.

After all, I could retreat the way I came. I was no worse off than before, and it must be near morning. So I resolved to withdraw in good order; but, before going, I could not resist taking another peep.

The fair apparition had advanced to the table, placing thereon the lamp and a glass of water which she had carried, the latter probably explaining the cause of her nocturnal ramble; and having seated herself before the mirror, was engaged in coiling up her flowing tresses, preparatory to re-seeking her couch.

Of course, I refrained from further investigation, and drew near the window, to be in readiness to commence my descent as soon as the lady should fall asleep.

Half-an-hour, perhaps, of stillness, and darkness elapsed, interrupted only by the rustling of leaves without, and gentle, regular breathing within the next room.

It was now nearly morning. And I almost expected to see the gleams of dawn as I climbed out upon the roof. But no; all was favourable, and I prepared to descend.

"Ur-r-r-r!"

Did I fancy I heard that beastly dog again?

"Ur-r-r-r!" in unmistakable and vigorous tones from below.

I peeped over.

That confounded dog has broken his chain, and there he was, waiting below, ready to seize me the moment I came within reach. I resolved to postpone my descent.

Was ever mortal in such a predicament? I sat down upon the window-sill and pondered. What was to be done?

Which was worse? to be surprised by daylight, on the roof of the bay-window, watched by the dog like a burglar, or to hide in the dressing-room, at the risk of being discovered by the lady?

Clearly the former was the less ignoble course; only, as the window led to the lady's chamber, what explanation could I give of my presence on the roof, that would not also involve the delicacy of the lady?

The case was desperate. I could come to no conclusion.

Still the old watch-dog, true to his name, stood guard below, perfectly silent, except when I made some movement. And now a few faint streaks of light illumined the horizon. I must do something, and immediately.

A sudden inspiration seized me; I must not be found on the roof by the servants; I could not hide in a lady's dressing-room. But the lady was sleeping—she probably would remain so some time longer; could I not steal softly through her room without waking her, conceal myself in the drawing-room till the servants were astir, and then step out at the hall door? The dog would certainly relax his vigilance as soon as the family were awake.

This I resolved to do, so slipping on my coat and vest, I took my boots in my hand, and started on my perilous way.

I softly crossed the dressing-room, opened the door without a creak, stole noiselessly over the thickly-carpeted floor of the chamber, glancing neither to the right nor to the left, till I reached the door. It was fastened, but the key was in the lock.

Just as I put my hand upon it I heard a slight movement.

All wrought up, and nervous as I had become, I could not repress a start, and—horror! I dropped my boots!

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It was all over! Involuntarily shutting my eyes, I turned and nerved myself for the impending scene, expecting heartrending shrieks, and subsequent alarm of the household, with all the contingencies that flashed through my brain like wildfire.

Perfect silence!

I opened my eyes. The lady was sitting bolt upright in her couch, and no marble statue could be whiter than she, nor stiller—she was literally paralysed with fright.

The glow of coming day now pervaded the room, and I knew that action must be prompt; so, scarcely knowing what words I used in my extremity, I began:

"I beg your pardon, madam—I entered the room, thinking it vacant. It used to be mine. I will retire——"

Here excitement, fasting, want of sleep, and, above all, my dreadful situation overpowered me, and I sank into a convenient chair gasping for breath.

My forlorn state acted as a restorative to the lady, and a lovely flush crept over her face as she replied, gently, but firmly:

"Sir, I cannot understand this, but I do not wish you to remain for an explanation. If what you say is true, you will immediately withdraw."

Her words were, in turn, like a tonic to me; I suddenly grasped the offending boots, threw open the door, and stood in the hall, but not before I had taken a parting glance at the lovely vision, with its fluffy white draperies and the rosy flush on the fair face.

My troubles were not yet over, however; for, unless I could safely pass through the outer door and present myself from without, I must give some explanation of the manner of my entrance: the truth I should never utter without the consent of the beautiful unknown.

I heard the servants moving about below; I heard old Jim, the gardener, calling the dog, and exclaiming over his broken chain; then came steps in the lower hall, and the unbolting and throwing-open of the front door.

I peeped over the balustrade. None of the family were yet down; and, as the footsteps retreated to the dining-room, I again took up my line of march, and, with a skill rivalling the most expert of housebreakers worked myself noiselessly down the stairs, and at last, —glory to the gods!—I stood on the outside.

I saw nothing of my old enemy, the dog, so I sat down on the steps, drew a long breath, and then put on my boots.

After regaining a little composure, I stepped boldly up to the door and rang the bell.

Satisfying the surprise of the maid with a few explanatory phrases, I asked for young Mr. Thwaites.

"You'll find him in the little hall chamber, sir, if you like to go up; we've had so many visitors that he gave his room to Miss Rossiter."

The mystery was explained. So it was Mabel Rossiter whom I had encountered.

I had heard her praises sung by every member of the Thwaites family, ever since she was in pinafores and I in jackets; but, owing to her having spent much time abroad with her parents, I had never chanced to meet her. And now—ye fates! what a meeting!

Thinking thus, I tapped at Gus's door. It was opened by my friend.

"Jupiter Olympus!" was his salutation. "Where did you come from? I should think you'd walked all the way from London, by the general 'all-gone-a-tive-ness' of your looks."

"Don't say a word, Gus," I intreated; "I'm tired to death. We had to wait three hours in a siding, owing to a breakdown on the line; and though I didn't walk from town, I did from the station, a little after midnight, and have been prowling about ever since."

Which was literally true, though I did not deem it necessary to state where I had been prowling.

"Why on earth didn't you rout us out?" asked Gus, rather emphatic in his disgust. "The idea of hanging about the outside of the house all night, when there were good beds and a warm welcome inside!"

"Yes, why didn't I?" I retorted, in the utmost indignation. "Ask that confounded and utterly abominable dog of yours why I didn't. A pretty fellow he is, to have on the premises of a respectable householder! Keep him out of my sight after this, if you want to keep him at all!"

Gus laughed.

"There, never mind, old boy; you're tired and cross, and no wonder. Here, just tumble into bed, and you shan't be disturbed for a week."

But I was in no mood for sleep.

"I'll take a wash, Gus," said I, "and lie down till breakfast; for I can't sleep, and some good hot coffee will set me up again."

"All right," said Gus, and, finishing his toilet, he left me to repose.

I had said truly that I could not sleep. Thoughts of my night's adventure, and everything connected with it, thronged through my brain and gave me no rest. What did the lady think? For, as yet, she knew not the cause of my strange intrusion. Would she recognise me? Would she allow me to make her acquaintance? How could I gain absolution for my frightful proceeding?

But the breakfast bell cut short my unsatisfactory musings, and I joined my friends in the dining-room.

Gus met me and placed me at his side, saying:

"Mother, here's poor Martin, who, as I told you, has been wandering in the grounds half the night, and stands in sore need of some of your best coffee."

After a smiling welcome from host and hostess, I greeted my other acquaintances among the merry party, and was introduced to the new-comers, Mr. and Mrs. Franklin, Mr. Preston, and—Miss Rossiter!

The lady strove her best to look unconcerned, but a blush would rise, and a repressed smile would dimple her cheeks; these, coupled with my embarrassment, caused some glances of surprise, and led Gus to exclaim:

"I believe you've seen each other before!"

I was silent, but Miss Rossiter instantly regained her composure, and replied:

"Yes, I think I have met Mr. Martin before, though I never had the pleasure of an introduction."

Bless her woman's wit! At this remark everybody subsided into customary commonplace, and breakfast went on.

It perhaps is almost unnecessary to say that my constant endeavour after this was to gain a private interview with Miss Rossiter, but, as we were decidedly new acquaintances, taken with the fact that she evidently avoided such a meeting, to accomplish the matter was a feat of some difficulty, and several days elapsed before I managed to do so.

At length, one pleasant day, when the ladies were supposed to be taking an after-dinner nap, I strolled towards a little rose-arbour with my cigar and book.

As I went in from the clear sunshine, my dazzled eyes did not at first identify a lady, who hastily rose in some confusion as I entered.

"I beg your pardon," I began, then suddenly

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recognised Miss Rossiter. "I implore you," I quickly ejaculated, "hear me! Only grant me five minutes! I must explain!"

The lady hesitated.

"Miss Rossiter," I continued in calmer tones, and with some dignity of manner, "I have to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your wonderful self-control and considerate silence in an affair that causes me the utmost distress and regret. If you will allow me, I will try to explain that unfortunate occurrence in such a way that even you will pardon me."

"You have my permission, sir," said Miss Rossiter, with a little stateliness, that I rather fancied was assumed to keep herself from smiling.

Somewhat encouraged I went on, and, if ever a man racked his brain for fit words for the occasion, I was that man, and I soon had the satisfaction of receiving full acquittal from the lady, together with the admission that she thought that inasmuch as I had unwittingly stumbled into such a predicament, I had chosen the very wisest course for extraction.

After this we were friends. She avoided me no more, and, in truth, it was not long before Gus accused me of being "regularly gone" on Mabel—a fact which I did not care to deny, and only wished he had been as good an authority as to the state of her mind towards me.

However, the few bright weeks, filled with all sorts of frolics, rides, drives, and tennis matches, slipped away rapidly, and the breaking-up was at hand.

On the last night of our stay, I coaxed Mabel down to the little rose-arbour. She seemed shy of entering, until we spied therein two or three others of our party enjoying the beauty of the evening.

After we had all chatted awhile, we were interrupted by Marlowe, who came after the rest of the party, according to appointment, to take a last excursion. This left Mabel alone with me, and, with a quickness born of desperation, I told her I loved her, and asked her to be my wife.

I need not put her reply in words; but, after the lapse of about half-an-hour, as I sat with her fair hands in mine, just as the voices of the returning party were borne to our ears, I said:

"How good it was of you, darling, not to make an alarm that time, as most women would have done unthinkingly, and then, what a position we should have been in!"

"Thank you, dear," she responded demurely, "but I must not accept more merit than I deserve. You see, I knew you, if you didn't know me; for, only the evening before, when Gus had gone to the station to meet you, good Mrs. Thwaites was talking about you, and showing the large photograph of you in the album in her room. So I recognised you, and, of course, after the first uncontrollable start, I knew that you were not likely to be prowling about with fell designs on unprotected damsels, or jewels; I knew, too, that I had your room, and, therefore, though very much amazed, I was not so utterly beside myself with fright as you have imagined."

I closed her lips with a kiss; but I insisted then, and still insist, that a most flagrant case of scandal was avoided simply by Miss Rossiter's presence of mind.

M. E. H.

A Nihilist's Revenge.

AN ugly, muggy, chilly evening, in spite of the fact that it was midsummer; but then I had found that weather in St. Petersburg was not all to be depended on. The streets were deserted, save when the death-carts rattled along, unmindful of their ghastly burdens. The city clocks had struck ten, and I was hurrying home—or rather to my den—to write my "special" to a London daily. Correspondents' letters are generally built upon a frail foundation of truth, but now, in these cholera times, I could hardly find time, or words strong enough, to depict the horrors I saw on every side.

I had delayed writing a little longer than usual, so that I might go more deeply into details, for the benefit of my horror-loving countrymen, and I was in haste. I was obliged to go through that part of the city most infected with the awful plague, where the air seemed reeking with infection, but being pretty well seasoned, I did not mind it very much.

As I hurried along, I saw, standing under a lamp, whose dim rays shed light but a few feet around it, a woman dressed in white.

As I passed her she stepped forward and said, with a tone of recognition: "I have been waiting for you."

I paused, and to my surprise recognised my beautiful friend, the Countess Reifsky, the toast of a hundred ballrooms, who had been flirting with me fast and furiously for some weeks—why, I could not imagine.

With reproof in every accent I exclaimed:

"Madame, what are you doing in this deadly atmosphere, and alone, at this hour?"

"I have been waiting for you," she repeated simply.

"How in the name of wonder did she know I was coming this way when I did not know it myself?" I asked myself.

I assumed a severe air.

"You must not stay here."

"No; I mean to take you with me to the final meeting of a society to which I belong. To-night we disband, and I want you to be there to describe the affair with your versatile pen to your great English people.

"You know we Nihilists are so misrepresented. No, you need not shrink away; you will come to no harm. Perhaps you do not enjoy being with a 'suspect.' To-night the far-reaching grasp of the Tsar himself would find it hard to reach me, and I shall place you beyond his power too. But we must hurry."

Half reluctant, and wholly fascinated, I allowed her to

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lead me along through the deserted streets until we came to a small, low building, which showed no ray of light. Here she tapped softly. The door swung back on noiseless hinges. Along a dimly-lighted hall we went to another door, which opened in the same quiet fashion, and we stood in the dazzle and glitter of a ballroom.

In my business suit I ought to have felt embarrassed, but I did not, for I was too much impressed by the scene before me.

It reminded me of what I had known in my younger days as "phantom parties," at which youths and maidens draped themselves in sheets. Yet that memory should not have given me a feeling of repugnance, for of those happy days I had the pleasantest recollections. As I looked more closely I recognised the fact that these people were masquerading in grave-clothes—mocking the destroyer which held the city in its grasp; and a great horror filled me.

I heard a low, musical laugh from the woman at my side.

"Monsieur does not approve of our masquerade? We laugh at Death. Come it in whatever fashion it may, by pestilence or in Siberian mines, we do not fear it. Swift or slow, it matters not to us."

"Yes, madame; I have heard that you Nihilists, if I must class you among them, care not how swift be the death to which you consign your victims."

"I see you do not approve of our methods, but you see we know of no other way more honourable. With us the end justifies the means, but when we must send death it is always quick."

"Not always. Bombs don't always work surely."

A gleam in my fair companion's eyes warned me I was on dangerous ground, but it was gone almost instantly, and she continued:

"Now in the case of the late prime minister—when his fate was sealed, we decided——"

I caught her arm, not knowing what damaging revelation she might make.

"Countess, you are insane. In your country, walls have ears."

"Monsieur, these walls are safely guarded. But we are missing the music and the dance."

Never, so long as memory lasts, shall I forget that evening. Noble and artisan met on equal ground. Social distinctions seemed for the time being obliterated. Brain, wit, and a common cause were the passports to this brilliant society. Words were spoken which would condemn a man to Siberia for a lifetime. No one seemed to notice me very much, beyond a courteous recognition, and as I looked among the guests, I saw my brother correspondent and compatriot, John McPherson, who was also clad in a business suit, and who seemed, like myself, a visitor.

The hours flew past. I thought somewhat uneasily of my neglected letter, but could not drag my reluctant feet away from the fascination of the scene.

The music grew faster, and more weird were the strains. My feet fairly ached to tread to their measure, but something held me back.

The hour grew late, the lights were dim, still the dancers kept up their dizzy whirl. The music rose and fell now wailing now entreating; I felt I must yield to it. My beautiful countess put her white arm on mine. I felt her warm breath sweep my cheek.

"Come with me; forget toil and sorrow. Name and fame are worth little. Together we should be for ever happy."

I looked into her great, seductive brown eyes, and almost yielded, but before my vision came a little primrose-faced girl I had left in a Devonshire village. I saw her as I had bidden her good-bye, and I pushed my temptress back.

The white arm fell, the music stopped with a crash, the decorations faded, the smiling faces vanished—changed in an instant—and with a cry of horror I saw death written on every countenance. I heard a hissing in my ear:

"When you are racked with pain upon a cholera bed, remember a Nihilist's revenge."

The floor swam. I turned and fled. At the door I met McPherson. Outside the grey dawn had broken; I turned to see where we were, and I recognised the grim walls of the morgue.

An hour later Mac and I were counted among the plague victims, hurried to the pest house. I pulled through, almost by a miracle; he, poor fellow, found a nameless grave.

Some weeks later, when I looked over the piles of newspapers which had accumulated in my absence, I read the notice of the death of the Countess Riefsky on the 17th of July, the day of my strange adventure.

H. P. D.

NOW READY.

Pearson's Magazine.

MAY, 1896.

Gates and Pillars of the Empire. *Robert Machray.*
No. 2.—Glasgow Illustrated.

The Ransom (A Complete Story). *C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne.*
Illustrated by Warwick Goble.

The Gorgeous Palaces of the Tsar. *Mary Spencer Warren.*
Illustrated with photographs.

Negro Serenade—"I Don't Care." *H. J. Nicholls.*
Illustrated by S. Nation.

Curiosities of Stained Glass Windows. *Ernest R. Suffling.*
Illustrated with drawings and photographs.

The Liar (A Complete Story). *Edwin Pugh.*
Illustrated by E. F. Sherie.

How Our Army is Clothed. *Frank Lamburn.*
Illustrated by George Ashton.

Wisdom Let Loose. *W. L. Alden.*
Illustrated by Charles May.

The Message (Verse). *May Kendall.*
Illustrated by Anthony Fox.

The Money We Spend on Sport. *J. Mason.*
Illustrated by E. F. Sherie.

The Bravest Deed I ever Saw. *J. M. Le Sage.*
Illustrated by Raymond Potter and C. L. Le Sage.

The Soldiers of the Khedive. *Francis John.*
Illustrated with photographs.

Secrets of the Courts of Europe. *Allen Upward.*
No. 5.—"Prince Citron."
Illustrated by Hal Hurst, R.B.A.

In the Public Eye.
Illustrated with photographs.

Gata (A Complete Story). *Cuthbert Barnby.*
Illustrated by Trevor Haddon.

A Peep into Penal Servitude. *George Griffith.*
Illustrated by H. Piffard.

The Shrinking Shoe. *Sir Walter Besant & W. H. Pollock.*
Illustrated by A. Jules Goodman.

The Fresh Air Fund. *Clement Scott.*
Illustrated by S. Nation.

The Editorial Mind.

THE LAW OF THE PLAINS.

The outfit of twelve waggons had stopped at a point on the Rio Pecos about seven miles above the town of Anton Chico. We had supper and were smoking our pipes, and it was between sunset and dark when a young fellow about twenty years old came riding up from the direction of the Comanche country. He was dressed like a cowboy, and what few words he spoke were in good English. He rode up to a camp-fire round which five or six of us were sitting, and after a "Good-evening" to all, dismounted and let his gaze wander about.

Teamster No. 5 was a Mexican half-breed known as Big Pete. He gave a start of surprise as the stranger rode up, and I heard him cursing and muttering to himself. By-and-bye the boy fixed his gaze on Pete and kept it there for a long half minute. There was a sort of smile on his face which made one think of the look of a wolf who had pursued a victim for hours and hours and was finally near enough to seize it.

"Rifle, pistol, or knife?" he asked of Pete in a low, even voice.

The big fellow looked round uneasily. He was no coward, as we all knew, but the sudden appearance of the boy had startled him for a moment. A full moon was coming up, and there would be light enough for fire-arms. He was a good shot, but that long, sharp knife was his favourite weapon. Besides, he was a giant compared to that slender but active-looking youth.

"The knife, and I will give you one minute to say your prayers!" shouted Pete as he sprang up.

"Very well. Just as you please!" quietly replied the young man as he unbridled his horse and sent him away.

Not a word was spoken by any of the rest of us. We all rose up, but made no other move. Not a question was asked of either man. It was the law of the plains. One man had the right to demand satisfaction of another by rifle, revolver, or knife. As to the cause of the quarrel, why should we ask or care? Pete removed his belt and jacket and sombrero, and tied a handkerchief around his head. The stranger removed his belt in which he carried a couple of revolvers, threw aside his sombrero, and walked off to a distance of fifty feet. Pete followed. Every man in camp formed a circle about the pair. The moon made everything as plain as daylight. The horses and mules were all to the right of us. So far as I could see, all of them stopped feeding and gazed steadfastly at the circle.

"Ready!"

It was the stranger who called out, and at the word both moved into the centre of the ring and menaced each other. A fight to the death with knives is a horrible thing to look at, and yet there is a magnetism about it which forces you to stand and look till the end comes. Boxers move about, feint, advance, retreat, rush at each other, and grapple. So it is with men who fight with knives. Back and forth across the circle, round and round it, their knives now and then clashing together, and it was ten long minutes before blood was drawn. With the first drop came death.

No man called out. No man in the circle moved out of his tracks. Some of the horses came nearer and whinnied softly, as if asking what it was all about, but this we remembered afterwards. Big Pete was working to make his great strength bring him an advantage. If he could seize that boy's right arm with his left hand and hold it for five seconds the duel would be ended. Thrice he attempted it and thrice he failed. Suddenly the boy found the opening he had been seeking. So swiftly that none of us could follow him he sprang forward under the uplifted right arm there was the flash of a knife, and Big Pete uttered a groan and sank down.

"You are witnesses that it was a fair fight," said the stranger as he stood over Pete and looked round the circle.

It was fair, but no man answered. He called his horse by a low whistle, slipped on the bridle, and half a minute later was cantering away to the east. Big Pete had wronged him. The law of the land would not give him satisfaction. The law of the plains had avenged him. A grave beside the Pecos—a guess or two as to the stranger's identity—that was all.

Harry Rogers.

PICTURE ✣ PUZZLE ✣ PRIZE.

No. 5.

£10 TO BE GIVEN AWAY.

On the opposite page is a puzzle picture composed of 88 squares. If these squares be rearranged in a certain order they will form a real picture.

We offer a prize of £10 for the correct solution. In order to give readers in all parts of the United Kingdom as equal a chance as possible, none of the solutions received will be opened until Thursday, May 7th, when all those received will be considered together. In the event of two or more correct solutions being included in one day's post, the prize will either be given to the sender of the *neatest* one, or will be divided amongst the correct competitors at the discretion of the Editor. Consolation Prizes will also be awarded.

If no correct solution be received on or before Tuesday, May 12th, 1896, the Ten-Pound Prize will be given to the sender of the solution then to hand which is most nearly correct.

Pictures should be packed flat or folded, not rolled, and the outside wrapper must be marked "July."

N.B.—To make the puzzle more difficult some of the squares have been turned upside down, others sideways.

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THE ✦ WINNING ✦ OF ✦ GUNHILD:

Or, The Vengeance of the Vikings.

By GEORGE C. WALLIS, Author of "Behind the Barrier," etc.

SUMMARY.

Valstran, a Dane, attacks North-hold, a Viking homestead, during the absence of the young men. Sigismund and Olaf follow the raider, but are defeated, and Olaf is killed. Editha, their mother, and Earl Bjorne, her husband, induce their only remaining son to take Harald Aslison and go out again in the new ship, the *Walrus*. Before leaving, Harald plights his troth to his cousin Gunhild, daughter of Editha. While they are out fighting against Valstran at sea, Turgrimm, a friend of Bjorne, comes upon the scene, but on learning that Harald requires help, refuses it, and goes on to Bjorne, whose daughter, Gunhild, he wishes to marry. Meanwhile Harald has slain Valstran, and after repairing his ship returns to North-hold on the eve of Gunhild's marriage with Turgrimm. A fight ensues between Harald's men and those of Turgrimm, with the result that the latter are turned out. Shortly after, Ogier, another friend of Bjorne's, arrives on the scene, and falls in love with Gunhild, but being a noble man, he resigns after discovering her love for Harald.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Stratagem.

Ogier was more reserved than usual that day, and listened with silent gravity when they told him of the doings of Turgrimm and his ejection from the house. When he had heard the whole story he sat awhile in thought, then said:

"You are noble lads, Harald Aslison and Sigismund Bjorne; you will always be welcome at my home. As for this Turgrimm, he is no longer a friend of mine."

And thinking of this, Ogier rose and went down to the shore and aboard the *Silver-Fox* and told the sailors left on guard what he knew, bidding them have no intercourse with the men of Turgrimm's *Hawk*.

It was growing dusk when he was ready to return, and once or twice on his way back he thought he heard the splash of oars and the muffled sound of voices on the fjord, but beyond wondering whether his quondam friend had anything to bring or send ashore, gave no further notice to the matter.

Now Turgrimm—for he it was whose oar-blades shattered the violet mirror of the water—had made up his mind to leave North-hold that very afternoon, but having afterwards seen a fierce-looking woman gesticulating wildly at the ship from the top of the rocks, a woman whom the sailors swore to be the witch Svenda of whom they had all heard, decided to land at twilight and consult her regarding his baffled plan, and even buy her aid, if by it his purpose might yet be worked.

He hailed the *Silver Fox* as he passed her in the boat, and receiving no response knew that Ogier had heard of his vain meanness, and so went on up the lake and landed, and then up the steep mountain path to where the cave of the Were-woman loomed black out of the hillside; the sudden fever of renewed desire and thwarted scheming and bitter hatred making him ready to listen to any evil counsel that might be given him, and more reckless than usual as to the right or wrong of his after-deeds.

Svenda looked even more frightful than she really was in the flickering glare of the torchlight she held aloft as she beckoned in, with skinny finger, her almost equally repulsive-featured guest. She stuck the spluttering torch in a cleft in the rock and then laughed—a shrill, gruesome, high-pitched laugh, that echoed dismally from the silent hills across the waters of the lake.

"Ha, ha! So you have come, as I expected, Sir Turgrimm!" cried she, drawing a short dagger from her black, matted hair. "And for no good purpose, I ween! Folk who have no dirty work to do give me plenty of room to pass as a rule."

"I am not here to listen to idle talk," said Turgrimm, "nor have I time to waste. I want your advice and help regarding something of which you may have heard. I am rich, so you will be well paid, and here is a small bag of gold to whet your interest."

The claw-like hand snatched the bag from his grasp, and the long, bony fingers closed on it greedily.

"Gold, gold!" cried the Were-woman, "it is the only thing I love now. But of your errand—there is no need to tell me, for I know what it is and how you may have revenge on your rival and secure your bride as well."

"How? Tell me," asked the man, from whose coward face all the colour was gone now, "tell me, witch, and your pay shall be doubled if it succeeds."

"Ay, I will tell you," said Svenda, playing with the short dagger, which seemed to slide along her horny skin without cutting. "I will tell you when I am ready. But know this, rich nithing, that it is for no friendship for you that I do this, but only for your gold and for the hate I bear another."

"Stop this chatter, woman!" cried Turgrimm angrily, though awed somewhat by the weirdness of the scene, "and put that knife down and tell me what I want. I have no time to waste, I repeat."

"It is a very useful dagger, and has done some good work in its time," said Svenda, grinning horribly, "it has drunk some noble blood before to-day, and is a wonderful silencer of one's foes! Ay, I will tell you, but first I would have you to know, Viking, that though I take your gold I hate you as I hate all men, whose hearts are full of deceit towards women, even as I hate all women for their pink prettiness and trust in men and fear of me. Yes, I hate you, as I hate them all.

"But for your ill-gotten gold

A fierce-looking woman gesticulating wildly at the ship from the top of the rocks.

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I will befriend you. Put your ear to my lips—nay, no shrinking, craven!—and I will whisper to you, for it is a thing not well to shout to the night air!"

Now, in this the Were-woman was wise, for it so happened that a thrall of Harald's who was passing along the cliff had been drawn to the cave by unusual curiosity to see what game the witch was up to with a light in her generally dark abode, and, being unperceived, had heard most of the foregoing conversation. Yet no names had been mentioned, and, though he strained his hearing, the plan they were concocting was whispered too low for him to catch its import, so he had only a vague tale to carry to his master, who laughed at it and said there were enough strong men in the hold to defy all the tricks of the Viking and all the spells of the witch.

Could Harald have seen the startled look on Turgrimm's face as he listened to the Were-woman's advice—a look that grew to a smile so malevolent as the witch breathed on the dagger and gave it to him, that the thrall was unable to decide which of the two faces was the more evil—he would have been less confident of his own and of Gunhild's security.

* * * * *

Towards the small hours of the morning, when peaceful and honest folk sleep most soundly, a little band of men crept up to the back of the house and made forcible but silent entry into the buttery, from where access to the several living rooms was easy, since it was not customary to secure inside doors in that age.

Softly stealing along the passages, the group came to the room where Harald's mother and sister slept, and, leaving the rest outside, Turgrimm stepped gently in, with dagger in hand, and sought the bed where the little girl lay.

A straggling glint of moonlight crept through the lattice, and shone for an instant on the fair young head, with its clustering curls, and the bare white arm thrown back upon the pillow; and very pretty appeared the sweet child sleeping there so placid, so innocent, and so unconscious of the short, sharp blade that hovered above the creamy throat.

Yet Turgrimm's heart gave him never a qualm, for every rough-and-ready Viking of his type had seen and done too many deeds of blood and rapine to be lightly turned aside from a cherished desire. The coast villages of our British Isles could have told many a harrowing tale in that time of the northmen's ruthless slaughtering that would have put this deed of his into the shade.

So the keen steel sank swiftly down with unwavering stroke, and the little life was quenched without a sound sufficient to wake the mother sleeping so near. Then, wiping the blade on the bed-linen, the Norseman stepped from the room as softly as he had entered, and when he and his men had got clear away from the house bade them run to the ship with all speed and weigh anchor and row up the fjord as quietly as possible. And ere the dawn had tinted the portals of the east with pink and rose and the household was awakened to the horror of the night the *Hawk* was far out of sight *up* the inlet and moored behind a sheltering spur.

* * * * *

How can I—why need I—tell of the finding of the little corpse, of the wild grief of Freyda, of the tearless sorrow of Harald, of the gloom on the whole house, of the stern resolve to wipe out the deed with the doer's life?

"'Tis no other than black-hearted Turgrimm," said Harald bitterly, remembering what the thrall had told him yesterday, "'tis he who has done this, or why would the *Hawk* be gone so suddenly? How many will go with me in the *Walrus*?—for this will be a sterner chase than that of Valstran."

No need to ask for volunteers—there were men enough and to spare for both his ship and the *Silver Fox*, which Ogier insisted on placing at his service, and giving themselves and their men scant time to put away the desire for food, Harald and Ogier and Sigismund went aboard the vessels and hoisting sail to a favouring breeze and setting all the rowers to work, stood out for the open sea with intent to come up with the *Hawk* if possible, or pursue her to her owner's home if necessary.

Harald and Sigismund stood in the bow, hand in hand,

The claw-like hand snatched the bag from his grasp.

both gazing seaward yet neither speaking for awhile. Then the one-armed cousin said in a choking voice:

"Come with me and have some food. You will require it before our revenge is done."

Harald made no answer. Little Thelma was his favourite, his darling, whose merry laugh and mirthful prattle had cheered and amused him at the close of many a weary day, and it seemed as though the intensity of his grief had dried the fountain of his tears and turned his face to stone.

And Freyda left at home was in no better way, refusing to be comforted by any of the kind friends who strove to assuage her sorrow, and sitting all the morning long rocking to and fro with her apron thrown upon her head.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WAGER.

THAT day, at noon, Turgrimm, watching from his deck, saw Svenda signalling to him from the cliffs near the Rainbow Falls, and knowing by that the coast was clear, came down to the landing-place with the ship, then boldly marched up to the sorrow-silent house.

There were but half-a-dozen able men besides the old Earl left in the place, and so what slight resistance was offered was useless to prevent the ruthless Vikings from carrying off Gunhild and leaving the house in a state of general wreck. The Earl they left bound in his chair, almost beside himself with impotent rage and futile self-reproach, and the women they fastened in their own room, so that it would be some time before they could escape to

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Turgrimm stepped gently in, with dagger in hand.

carry the news. Then, taking the weeping Gunhild down to the *Hawk* and binding her to the mast, they ran up the sail and forged out of the road and into the open sea.

For six days they held on to the south, undeterred by storm or tide and unchallenged by any hostile craft, and never once was Gunhild left unguarded all those weary days. Twice Turgrimm renewed his love-making, telling the scornful girl how he had bought advice from Svenda and carried it out—and yet cheated the Were-woman at the end.

"Yes, my pretty one!" said he, "you will have a cunning fellow for your husband soon. For the witch's help and incantations for my success she was to have two bags of gold, one of which I gave her at the time, promising to pay the other when satisfied. But never a glint of Turgrimm's gold will the foul hag see again! Ho! ho! By the Tree Igdrasil, the Nornas have spoken in my favour, sweet one, and you will do well to submit to me with a good grace!"

"Never!" said Gunhild.

"Wait until we get to Dertheim, pretty one," said he, "then we shall see. Meantime I doubt not that your brother and cousin have been there before me, only to find themselves well fooled. And if we can pass them unseen on their return journey all will indeed be well."

This latter sentence raised a sudden spark of hope in Gunhild's breast, only to be extinguished as suddenly, for a driving Northern mist came down the following night, and when it had cleared away next morning Turgrimm walked the deck in high spirits, thanking the gods for so favouring his schemes, for in the semi-light of the chill dawn his look-out had espied the black sterns of two ships rapidly vanishing into the grey murk to the north.

To Dertheim Hold, then, came Turgrimm and his prisoner, only to find, as they expected, that most of the home serfs were slain and the house itself a black, charred wreck, some of the smoke-grimed timbers still aglow with creeping veins of fire.

"They have done their work well, gentle maid, I swear!" said the Viking, stroking his grizzled chin and smiling ironically; "but 'tis little matter. I can soon have a new house built and buy fresh serfs, and while we are getting settled, you and I, Gunhild, can live in one of the cottages in the garth. And here, at all events, is the last place they will look for us again!"

The girl shuddered and shrank from his embrace as though stung by an adder, and frowning darkly at her aversion, Turgrimm ordered the men to take her to the nearest hut and fasten her in.

"We will see what a little wholesome solitude and frugal fasting will do for her proud scorn!" he said.

But there was something of the stern spirit of her mother, Editha, in Gunhild's nature; the gentle influence of the White Christ had not yet supplanted the belief in the brave old gods of the Northland, and so not a word of pleading nor a sign of submission did Bjorne's daughter give when Turgrimm went to see her on the third day and brought food and drink. She was almost spent then, but relentless still, though her fair cheeks were red with the course of many scalding tears, her eyes sunken in great hollows, and her lithe fingers chafed and thin with constant frantic clasping of her hands.

Clearly, if he would have her bend to his will without main force—which would be a profitless success at best, a poor end to his plan, though a revenge to be reserved to the last, if all else failed—some other means would have to be tried to bring her to a fit frame of mind.

It was in vain he raved and pleaded and swore and spoke such honeyed words as he could, and threatened and sneered by turns. At last, weary of his importunity and tired of listening in silence, Gunhild rose up in fiery disdain, and, with eyes flashing and a rush of colour to her pallid cheeks, cried:

"I will *not* be your love, coward, traitor, and murderer! I will never consent to be married to so vile, so evil-hearted a man; nay, if you and your cruel men force me to the bridal seat of your new house, and bind the wedding-crown upon my head, and force the loving-draught between my lips, even then I shall defy you. At the last I shall have the one resource left that not even you can take away, for if you drag me to your bridal bed, it shall be as a corpse, and a corpse only! And now go, nor think I shall soil myself with speaking to you further."

Turgrimm quivered under the lash of her stinging and

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defiant words. He bit his lip in vexation till the blood came, and went out of the hut, darkly revolving certain plans in his mind. For a time now, Gunhild was left in peace and was well fed, though closely secured and guarded.

At the end of a month from her coming to Dertheim, a part of the new house was finished, and therein Turgrimm and his chief vassals installed themselves, making boisterously merry the first night of their dwelling there over the return of one Sigurd, a great-limbed, strong-sinewed berserker who had been in Turgrimm's service long before.

The ale passed freely round, and joke and story of none too choice a kind was told from roysterer to roysterer along the board, but loudest voiced of all and most unblushing in the telling of deeds of shame and blood, and most uproarious in his coarse mirth, was Sigurd, the berserker, who, as midnight neared, began to rave in his cups, and to become a dangerous neighbour. Inch by inch the men on either side of him at the table edged further off, and even Turgrimm himself, evil and hardened as he was, felt put to the blush by this erstwhile follower of his, and what with fear for his freaks and mortification at the failure of his wooing, sat moody and taciturn at the feast.

"What ails you, friend?" said Sigurd, noticing this at last. "Why look so miserably glum when all are so jolly? Art in love, or hast lost a fortune?"

Turgrimm's face darkened, but not wishing to appear offended, he owned that it was a woman that was the cause of his depression.

Loud and long laughed Sigurd at that.

"Come, bring out your wayward charmer!" he roared in his thick, gruff voice, a loud hiccough punctuating his sentences, "and let us look at her, and maybe we shall find means to conquer her dislike."

Turgrimm hesitated at first, but Sigurd looked so menacingly at him when he began to offer excuses that he sent a couple of stout thralls to the hut, who brought her in and placed her, with hands bound, at the end of the long pine table.

"She is my prize," said Turgrimm, a way of keeping her from Sigurd—whose wolfish eyes were feasting on the beauty which showed even under the sorrow-stains of captivity—suggesting itself to his mind, "she is mine, but so wayward that if you care, my doughty men, we will play a game of odds, and she shall be my wager."

So the half-drunken men fell to and played; but Sigurd had learned more craft on his travels than Turgrimm gave him credit for, and, to the latter's disgust, won all before him, until only his host remained to play.

Then the two villains sat down to play the last game, each prepared to stretch his honesty as far as the bleared eyes around would let, and in the end Turgrimm won. Gunhild gave a sigh of relief. He was brute enough, but the thought of falling into Sigurd's clutches—to be his sport for an hour, and then to be cast to the serfs, perchance—was too horrible. That worthy, however, was not to be put off so easily; he saw the look of relief in her eyes, and it fanned the flame of his vile desire.

"Not so fast, friend Turgrimm!" he roared, twisting his grey-streaked beard in his rough hand savagely; "we will have another game now, and she shall again be the wager. We will wrestle for her, you and I!"

The other's face turned a sickly paleness at that suggestion, but there was no help for it, so he said:

"As you will; but first let some of my serfs have the chance of winning her."

"I care not how I get her so I do get her!" laughed Sigurd, "whom shall I treat to the strength of these arms?"

"Othnar shall try the hazard," and Turgrimm named the stoutest-limbed and most noted wrestler present, "and the girl to the winner."

Then Othnar rose from his seat, and glancing once at Gunhild, advanced to meet the berserker, and the two were soon locked in a mad embrace, writhing this way and that along the rush-strewn floor.

The others drained their cups and sat back to watch and cheer them on with drunken levity, while Gunhild stood trembling at the end of the table, watching the two men with dilating eyes, her mind in a whirl of terror.

Presently the grey light of early day crept in through the casement and shone with ashen tint upon the flushed faces of the drunken men around the table, and the fiery visages and contorted forms of the two who still struggled, with cracking joints and heavy breathing and violent lifts, to win a wager that such men have seldom chance to wrestle for.

At last, with a crafty move, a mighty heave, Sigurd got Othnar off the ground, and poising him in air a moment, gathered his strength and threw him backwards over his shoulders with such force that the wretched man's head bent under him as he fell, and his backbone snapped and he died with one wild gasp of pain!

Forgetting that he was their master's servant, the men broke into a loud cheer at the feat, and drew back readily to let the victor seize his prize. And Turgrimm himself was too much in bodily fear to venture to cross the berserker in his present mood, so said not anything when Sigurd cut the thongs that bound Gunhild's hands, and finding she would not follow him outside to the hut allotted to him, and where he intended sleeping off the wild carouse, seized the rich golden hair that hung dishevelled on her back and shoulders, and bore her by it shrieking through the doorway.

In that awful moment Gunhild felt that all hope was lost, and breathing Harald's name with her lips, drew the small dirk she had cherished for this last resource with intent to plunge it into her heart and so end the suffering that her luckless beauty had brought upon her. But the berserker saw the steel in time and snatched it from her grasp, and with a little cry of despair the girl swooned away.

CHAPTER X.

THE EDGE OF THE LONG SWORD.

VOYAGE-WORN and sorrow-weary, Harald and his friends came back to North-hold after a three weeks' fruitless search along the coast and in the many inlets, and with dejected air walked into the great hall. One glance around showed the three leaders that their enemy had been there since their departure, and a chill of terror struck Harald when he saw that Gunhild sat not by her mother's side, and that the eyes of stern Editha were even then red with tears. They saw the question in his eyes, and the old Earl said in a broken voice:

The girl shuddered and shrank from his embrace.

"'Tis better you should know, all of you, at once. Turgrimm and his men came here the day you left and slew my men and carried away my Gunhild. And you have not found him?"

"No," said Sigismund, for Harald could find no words, and Ogier was slower of speech than even he was wont. "We sacked and burnt his place, but he was not there, and we have hunted him along the coast in vain."

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"What can be done?" queried Editha, in a hard, dry tone.

"Nothing," said the Earl; "it will be a useless search I fear, now that you have missed him."

"Nothing!" cried Longsword, turning to face the old man, "nothing! By Thor, but if you can give up your daughter so easily, I cannot give up my love while I have strength to wield a trusty blade! Come, Ogier, we will hunt out this Were-woman who was seen in converse with that dog, and force her knowledge out of her, if need be. Come!"

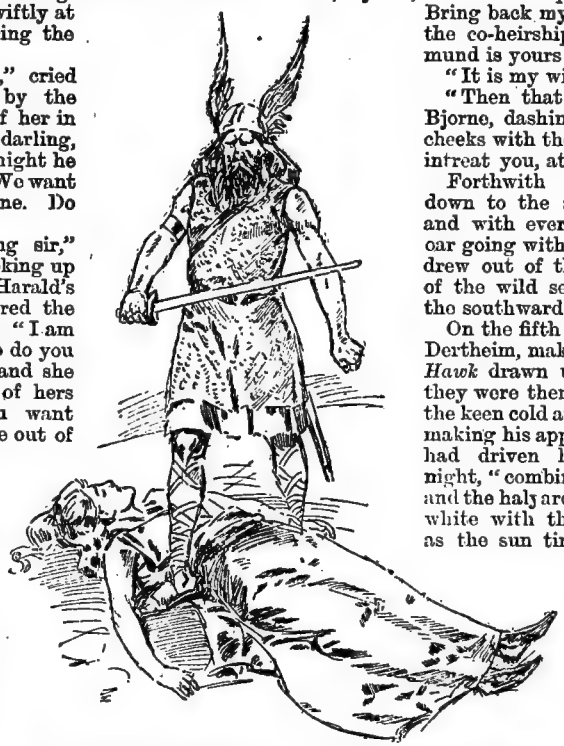
Impatient, Harald strode away, and the two followed with hasty strides until they came to the gloomy cavern, where Svenda sat brewing a foul-smelling stew in a small pot on a log fire. She looked up swiftly at their entrance, then went on stirring the mess with studied unconcern.

"We have come to ask, Witch," cried Harald, shaking her roughly by the shoulder, and forgetting all fear of her in his haste to get news of his stolen darling, "what you said to Turgrimm the night he slew my little sister in her sleep. We want to know where the wretch has gone. Do you hear?"

"I am not deaf, my fine young sir," growled the Were-woman, never looking up from her work, save once when Harald's man, Eric, with bow in hand, entered the cave and stood behind his master. "I am not deaf, nor am I in any mood to do you a favour, for love or for gold!"—and she laughed again that horrible laugh of hers—"but I will tell you what you want because this Turgrimm cheated me out of half my price for breathing him a spell and lending him my silent dagger and suggesting a clever way for his dull wit to follow. Yet I will take your money after all. How much will you give me for my news?"

"A hundred marks of gold," said Harald abruptly.

"Then if you want the wretch—who thought to cheat me and escape my vengeance—you must seek him in his own lair, for there I told him to go after you had been and returned. His ship was anchored yonder by the cliff when yours set sail, and you must have missed him on the seas. Now your gold!"



The berserker standing over her with a great blade drawn.

"Not a mark, not a grain, wretched witch!" said Harald turning on his heel; "you may be thankful that I have not time to stop and slay you for your foul work. Come, friends; we have work to do now, and must be away!"

"For that defiance I will tell you what I would have kept back," cried she. "I will tell you that the Valkyrs have chosen one of you three; that one of you goes to his death! And for that defiance I will have my revenge on you, Harald Aslison!" and Svenda sprang towards him with a scream of rage, and raised her claw-like hands as though to strike him to the earth. But Eric, who had been silently fitting an arrow to his bow while they talked, was too quick for her, and ere the talons could descend, the feathered shaft had caught her full in the breast, and Svenda the Witch fell back with a wild shriek of mingled hate and pain.

"A good deed well done!" cried Harald, with the first smile that had wreathed his face since little Thelma had been killed. "Let us be gone."

Back to the hold they went and told their news, and after restocking the two ships with more food and more weapons, prepared to set out once more on their voyage of vengeance. Harald and Sigismund would have dissuaded Ogier from risking his life in their quarrel, especially after the evil prophecy they had just heard, but he simply answered, in a tone that ended the matter:

"I shall not rest till Turgrimm be sent to Hela. I am a man, and my friends' quarrels are my quarrels."

Then Harald sought out Earl Bjorne before he went aboard, and told him of his love for Gunhild, and begged his consent to their marriage if he should succeed in rescuing her in time. The old man broke down at that appeal, remembering his harsh treatment of Harald, and said:

"Go, my son, and waste no precious time over my wishes. Bring back my Gunhild to me, and she and the co-heirship to North-hold with Sigismund is yours from then, if he wills it."

"It is my wish," said Sigismund.

"Then that is settled, my sons," cried Bjorne, dashing the tears from his aged cheeks with the back of his hand. "Go, I intreat you, at once, and fail not."

Forthwith the stern-faced men went down to the ships and got under weigh, and with every inch of sail set, and every oar going with a measured, sweeping swing, drew out of the fjord to the open bosom of the wild sea and held on their way to the southward night and day.

On the fifth morning they drew near to Dertheim, making out the dark hull of the *Hawk* drawn up on the shore long before they were themselves visible—so clear was the keen cold air. The frost king, Thrymm—making his appearance early this autumn—had driven his cloud-horses home last night, "combing their manes" as he went, and the halyards and masts and sheets were white with the small round rime, which, as the sun tinged it, shone and sparkled and glistened in the level rays like a myriad glow-worms clustered round the ropes and spars and sharp and rounded woodwork edges.

"Luff!" cried Harald to his sailors, as the cold shore loomed into nearer view. The willing men ran to their work with eagerness, despite their numbed hands and the keen breath of the morning wind, and in a trice ran the brace through the blocks and brought the boom round, and very soon the *Walrus* hove to, and they let down the gangway plank and Harald and Sigismund got ashore. The *Silver Fox* touched ground at almost the same moment, and Ogier and his men joined them ere they had taken ten paces towards the half-built house, wherefrom streamed several rays of sickly light and the sound of loud laughter and many voices.

"How best can we surprise them?" asked cautious Sigismund.

"I care not how, so long as we get them at sword-point, and that speedily," said Harald; "but we had best stay here till Ogier can reach the back, and so——" when suddenly a wild cheer rang out from the house, followed by a brief calm, and then the door was opened, and out came Sigurd the Berserker, dragging Gunhild with him.

Harald sprang forward with a cry and an oath, saw Gunhild snatch something from her bosom and Sigurd dash it from her hand, and came up to find her fainted away, and the berserker standing over her with a great blade drawn.

Their swords struck fire on the instant, and at the ringing sound out poured Turgrimm and the rest of the startled

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revellers from the house, the sailors surrounding them at once, and back to back the doomed men, sobered suddenly, fought as best they could at the disadvantage.

They were outnumbered, surprised, and unsteady with drink and long sitting, and very soon the paid men of Dertheim were separated and cut down one by one till only Turgrimm himself, and Sigurd, and four others, remained alive. Turgrimm, feeling that his last hour had come, had turned at bay and was fighting as desperately as any of the rest, and these six made so stubborn a resistance that there was a fear lest the whole country-side should be roused ere the work was done.

But the cool bravery of silent Ogier, and the cautious strokes of one-armed Sigismund and the fierce sweeps of Longsword, were not to be denied, and it was not long before only Sigurd and Turgrimm were left, standing back to back inside the closely-pressing ring of their pitiless foes.

Now the berserk fury came upon Sigurd, and, being relieved of Harald's attack now that the latter was engaging Turgrimm, he turned, all wounded and bleeding as he was, the foam flecking his lips and his bloodshot eyes glaring fire, and laid about him so lustily that the sailors gave back a space before his terrible advance.

Then Sigismund stepped forward to stop him as he strove to reach the recumbent form of Gunhild, but the great, heavy blade whirled madly once in air and then came down, and Sigismund's sword broke under it and he fell, the berserker's weapon piercing his mail at the shoulder joint.

Then, as the blade flashed once more above Gunhild's prostrate form, Ogier sprang to the rescue, and the silent man's axe struck the mad giant full on the nape of the neck and hurled him sprawling forward with a vivid roar of pain that ended in a death-rattle as he touched the ground.

Meantime, Harald had been playing with Turgrimm as a cat with a mouse, beating his defence at every stroke, piercing his armour in a score of places, and sending him reeling from the long sword's point till he was tired of the grim frolic, yet delaying the fatal blow so that his foe felt the fear of death a dozen times or more. But as Sigurd fell, what little spirit was in the craven flared up like the last flicker of a dying candle, and for a moment, with wild, reckless strokes and fierce cuts he held Harald on equal terms.

Then his strength and nerve failed, the merciless foe beat down his last weak effort of defence, sending his blade spinning from his hand; and then, raising Longsword's shining length above his head, Harald brought down its keen avenging edge with wrathful force upon the cringing wretch before him, and so fiercely, that it bit clean through the polished helm, and hard skull, and evil head, and Turgrimm of Dertheim received the fate his wickedness well deserved.

* * *

Then they fired the half-built house and the stranded *Hawk*, and went back to their ships, the sailors carrying the insensible form of Gunhild and the body of dead Sigismund carefully on a bier of upturned shields.

Clasped in Harald's arms, her head upon his knee, Gunhild soon recovered from her long swoon, and smiled faintly up at him with a great joy when she saw that it was he and felt his passionate kisses upon her fair forehead and sweet lips. And he, all hacked and jaded by the fight, sat there holding her patiently until she was well enough to walk to the side to be refreshed by the salt sea-breeze as the *Walrus* ploughed the waters on her homeward way.

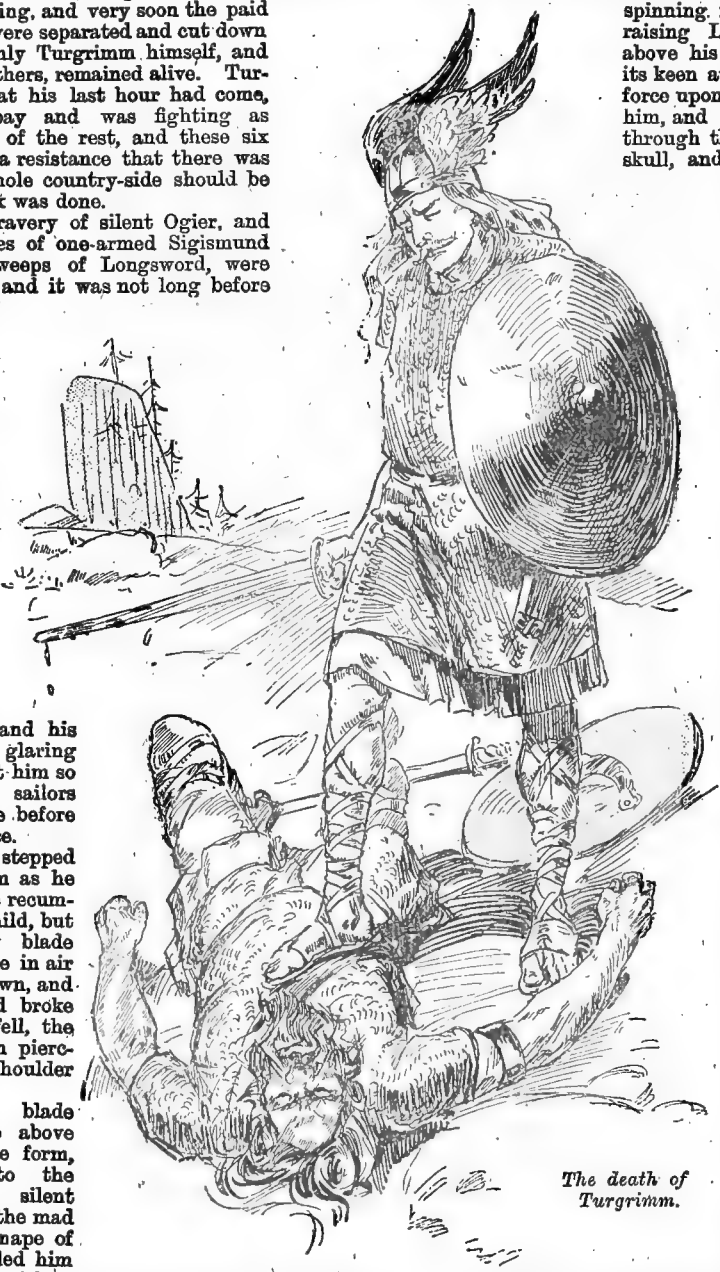
But the *Silver Fox* did not go back with them to Northhold. Ogier's love for Gunhild had risen within him anew, and tenfold stronger at sight of her, though he tried to fight it down, and he knew that in her presence there would be no peace for him. So when Harald pressed him to return, the man of few words said simply, as the two ships parted and the gulf between grew wider:

"I have done what I could to help you, friend Harald, but for many things it is better that I leave you now. Farewell!"

"Farewell!" said Harald, with a minor note of sadness in the joy that was his at last without fear, "farewell, dear friend, say at least that you will come again on a visit soon."

Ogier only shook his head at that, and Harald and Gunhild, with hands clasped, watched the brave, silent man, standing there so nobly in the stern of his ship, until his figure grew indistinct in the morning haze on the sea, and the blue distance swallowed him from their sight.

THE END.



The death of Turgrimm.

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JAKE'S SQUAW.

CARMEN stood in the door of the cookhouse, her hand shading her eyes, and gazed intently over the prairie towards the west. The level rays of the sun cast a rosy glow on her brown cheeks, and gave a reddish tinge to the coal-black hair falling straight over her shoulders, after the manner of married women of her tribe. Carmen was a Spanish-Indian half-breed, and a beauty. She was known at Star Camp as Jake Ringer's squaw. When Jake came back from Mexico, after the trouble about his knifing Longhaired Ike had blown over, he brought this woman with him.

Jake was not a man to be lightly questioned. He kept his affairs to himself, and his hand was ever ready to his pistol when he was pressed beyond his liking; but it was whispered among the boys that he had stolen his dusky bride from her mother's lodge on the night that was to have consummated her nuptials with Big Grizzly, the Apaché chief. Jake was kind to her in a fashion that decidedly astonished the men best acquainted with his fierce and gloomy character. As for Carmen, her soft, brown eyes followed her rough lord with the faithfulness of a dog; no white wife could have been so gentle or so helpful as this savage girl.

She had been alone for a week now, while the herders were off on the range, rounding up the horses for their yearly branding. To-night she looked for them home. There was a sound of bacon sizzling in the big frying-pan, brown jacketed potatoes peeped from their hiding-place in the hot ashes, and Carmen left the door for a moment to peep into the oven at the biscuit colouring delicately inside. Carmen cooked well, and the boys ound her presence a welcome one, freeing them of irksome stewing over the stove when they rode home tired and hungry.

She glanced through the window as she rose from her biscuit inspection, then hastily returned to her post n the doorway.

Far off on the edge of the prairie a tiny moving cloud imade its appearance, creeping snail-like towards her; gradually it rolled and swelled and came rushing over the intervening plain, taking shape into rounded puffs ever falling and renewing.

"La caballada!" she murmured, in a satisfied tone.

At last there came the thunder of quick hoof-beats, and then the excited herd dashed after their leader into the big corral. The heavy gates banged, the chains rattled over the staple. Five hungry men sprang from their saddles, and, hastily picketing their ponies, made a bee-line for the cookhouse.

They greeted Carmen with boisterous jollity, flung themselves upon their benches, and, without further ado, began to devour the food set before them.

"Hey! this coffee is prime, my Carmen!" "Some white woman taught yer to make biscuits, gal!" "I say, Jake, you bet it's fine to get back to Carmen's cookin'!" vociferated one and another, as, the edge of their appetites dulled, they began to ply their knives more slowly.

Carmen paid no attention to their rough compliments. She was standing behind her husband's chair, acting as waitress when occasion required, at other times fingering his sombrero or timidly touching his tousled curls. Each man was duly supplied with edibles; but the crispest bacon and brownest biscuit found their way to Jake Ringer's plate, until finally he looked up and announced: "I've had enough! Now eat yourself."

The men rose from the table, and scattered to their evening occupations; only Jake remained, smoking in the doorway, while Carmen sat down to her meal of fragments.

As the last slouching figure vanished towards the cabins, he turned to the woman with a slow smile, and asked in Mexican: "Has it been lonely these days, *cara mia?*"

"It is always night in my heart when thou art gone, oh, my husband!"

Then still in the soft Mexican tongue, they talked together of such things as made up their life—of the range happenings, of the morrow's work, of what they would buy in Alamito when the herds were driven in to be sold.

Lastly, as Jake rose and knocked the ashes from his pipe, he remarked, in English:

"To-morrow and Friday's the brandin', but Saturday I'll make the boys get out the plough an' fix us a fire-break. The grass is uncommon long jest now, an' it's dryin' fast. Ef we don't look out, we'll have the whole camp goin' up in smoke."

He strode through the starlit dusk towards his

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sleeping shack, and Carmen, shutting softly the door of the cookhouse, followed slowly in the same direction.

The air felt stifling and oppressive. A stiff breeze came out of the south, but its hot breath filled the frame with uncomfortable languor. Old Tom Griffin, standing in the door of the boys' shack, hallooed to Jake as he passed him. Carmen slipped by them and into her own little shanty.

"Looky here, Jake," growled old Tom in an undertone, "the boys is snoozin' a'ready, but I can't turn in fer thinkin' er that pesky long hoss-feed out yander. With this here breeze, a fire cud come a-gallopin'—what d'yer say ter you'n me goin' out now an' burnin' off a bit? Jest fer luck!"

"Pshaw, Tom, 'tain't so awful dry yet, neither. Turn in man, an' quit botherin'. After the brandin's done, we'll up an' plough a good breakin'. You bet I'm tired, an' I ain't no mind ter go burnin' off this time o' night."

He turned on his heel and disappeared into the smaller cabin. Old Tom shook his head. "Them boys ain't keerful enough," he muttered. "Seems to me them critters yander air oneasy." He glanced once more towards the corral, where an unusual stamping and pawing seemed to confirm his words; once more he shook his head doubtfully; then, after a look all round the horizon, where no uncommon sign was manifest, he at last sought his bunk. Tired nature soon drowned his fears in sleep.

Five hours later a slim, red tongue reached over the crest of the knoll that bounded the horizon of Star Camp to the south. It writhed this way and that among the long grass-stems. Another and another followed it, then a wall of flame, reaching east and west as far as the eye could follow, rose over the ridge and bore down, with racehorse speed, upon the devoted little settlement below.

Jake Ringer stirred uneasily in his sleep, and flung a protecting arm over the quiet figure beside him. A glare of lurid light filled the little room with the brightness of noonday; but still they slept on. Outside in the corral, horses were snorting and stamping, their wild eyes staring at the distant but swift-coming danger. The animals picketed on the prairie tugged at their stout ropes, rearing and screaming.

Old Tom Griffin, awakened by the rising clamour, sprang with a bound to the door. "Fire! Fire!" he shouted. "Quick, out of this, or ye'll smother like rats in a hole!"

Four half clad figures rushed out into the night, and Dick Elland beat on Jake Ringer's door, calling: "Up! up! if ye value yer lives!"

Roused from his heavy slumber, Jake stumbled across the floor; trembling, Carmen followed close behind.

One look at the oncoming demon brought Jake to his wandering senses.

"A back-fire, quick, you idiots!" he bawled, and made a break for the cookhouse.

Old Tom laid a powerful, restraining hand on his shoulder.

"Too late, my lad!" he shouted above the din of the frantic penned-in herd. "That furnace 'ud reach us afore 'twas even started."

Indeed, the fiery breath of the advancing flames already scorched their faces.

"We must trust to our good horseflesh!" spoke up Dick Elland quickly.

A rush for the picketed ponies—in an instant more each man was riding for his life.

Jake Ringer was first in the saddle; he curbed his frightened steed with one strong arm, and with the other swung Carmen's light form to a seat behind him.

It was old Tom who stopped at the corral, snatched the chain from its hook, and flinging wide the gates, gave freedom to the poor, crazed creatures within the walls.

Fear lent wings to their feet—the ridden and the riderless together dashed eagerly towards the dark northern horizon, where, miles away, lay safely in the cool waters of the Brazos. No one looked back in time to see how, with a leap and a roar, the hungry flames pounced on the deserted buildings, and, in one moment, licked up every trace of man's handiwork. On and on, mile after mile of dry prairie slipping back from their swift-beating hoofs, sped the fleeing band.

Anxious faces turned now and then to see if they kept their start from their evil pursuer. It was Carmen, cowering on old General's broad back—Carmen, clinging with a clutch of despair to Jake's shoulders—who turned the oftenest. It was Carmen who first noticed that the short distance—so terribly, hopelessly short—between them and the eddying flame cloud was lessening. She shrieked aloud in her terror, but Jake bade her sternly: "Take courage. It's only two miles more to the river."

Only two miles!—but the pace was telling. The work-weary and laden ponies were already distanced by the flying herd. Old General, with his double load, still kept his place in the van, but Jake could feel he was weakening.

Nearer and nearer swept the destroying element. Slower and slower seemed to move the panting and straining horses.

A mile—a half-mile—now but a quarter—to safety! Could they make it? The fire was pressing them closely; the stinging smoke blinded men and horses; their skins parched and cracked in the awful heat. Inch by inch old General lost his frontage; in vain Jake plied the spur; the good old horse was spent.

In one last despairing glance backward, Jake saw that the flames were upon them; his brave beast still staggered forward, but at that pace nothing could save them. Carmen's face was buried on his shoulder.

With parched lips, the man muttered: "At least we die together!"

A wild scream rang through the pall of grass smoke. Old Tom on the river bank heard it—"*Adios, caro mio*, one alone may be saved!"

The clinging arms relaxed; relieved of the woman's weight, the horse sprang forward.

For a second her figure stood haloed, as her hair and light garments blazed upward; then the swirling billows shuts out the terrible picture.

Jake Ringer covered his eyes and fell forward on General's neck. He did not know that his hair was singed and his clothes already smouldering as his horse plunged into the Brazos. He did not know that his comrades lifted him gently up the opposite bank as the fire swept to the water's edge and died into sudden darkness. But when he came back to consciousness, then he knew that Carmen had given her life for him.

GERTRUDE MILLARD.

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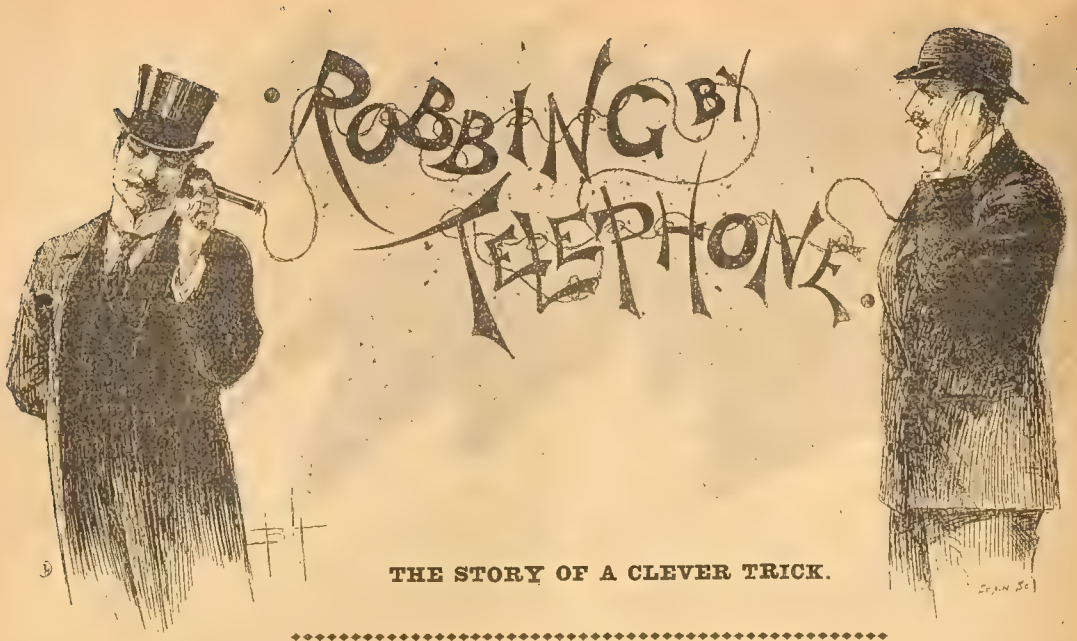

THE STORY OF A CLEVER TRICK.

"It is a well-known fact that no other section of the population avail themselves more readily and speedily of the latest triumphs of science than the criminal class," says a detective.

"The well-informed criminal skims the cream from every new invention, if he can make use of it. No iron safe has yet been constructed that keeps him out, but I don't recall a case in which this truth was more thoroughly demonstrated than the Maxwell case."

"What case was that?"

"It was at the time when the telephone had just been introduced into business and private use. George Maxwell was at that time one of the most successful speculators on 'Change, and was currently reported to have tipped the scale which marked £100,000. He was a young and handsome man, and had just married a lady of remarkable beauty. It was a decided love match. A score or so of messages were dispatched every day during business hours. They contained such important queries as: 12.10 p.m. 'How are you now, darling?' And replies like this: 2.35 p.m. 'I sigh for you. How is my sweetheart?' Well, to save outlay and to increase the facility of communication, Mr. Maxwell connected his office with his house by a private telephone wire.

* * * * *

"One day, just before the close of business, there was a ring at the telephone. The devoted husband, with a leap, was there. 'What does my darling wish?' he murmured.

"'I'm no darling. You mistake me, sir!' came the reply in a masculine voice, a voice rough and rasping, but very distinct.

"'Who are you, then?' asked the astonished Maxwell.

"'I'm Thomas Odell, the accomplished burglar, if you want to know!'

"'Repeat, please,' gasped the other.

"'Odell, the burglar,' came the answer. 'But, now listen, I cannot waste time. I and two of my gang have gained access to your house. The cook, the chambermaid, and your wife are lying here bound and gagged. The coachman has been disposed of. Some bundles of rags soaked in petroleum have been judiciously distributed about the house ready to be ignited.'

"'You scoundrel!' shouted the agonised husband, in an excess of emotion.

"'Don't excite yourself. Now, sir, here is my proposal. If you disappear from the telephone without acceding to it, I shall set fire to the house. It's no use applying to the police, for we'd be too quick for them. You will see, Mr. Maxwell, that you are utterly in my power. The only sensible thing you can do is to listen to my proposal, and to agree to it.'

"'Oh, I wish I had my hand at your throat, you villain!' shouted the other, shaking with rage.

"'But you know you haven't, so what's the use of your talking that way! Let us talk business instead. I need a loan of £2,000—cash. I need it at once. If you are inclined to lend me that sum without guarantee I shall leave your house with my men in exactly the same condition in which I found it.'

"'You are ruining me,' groaned Maxwell. 'And I don't think I have that much money in cash in the office safe.'

"'You'll force me to commit an atrocious deed,' came the remorseless reply.

"'All right, then—yes, I'll pay, but to whom?'

"'It is now 5.15 exactly. At this very moment my confederate has entered your office to receive the money. You will pay him and he will tell you that watchword agreed to between us, which you telephone to me at once.'

"Mr. Maxwell turned round. A stranger of pleasant mien, dressed in the height of fashion, stood before him. Said the visitor:

"'I have called to collect a little matter of £2,000 for a friend of mine, Mr. Thomas Odell.'

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"'I understand,' replied Mr. Maxwell, who went to the safe, took from it several packets of notes to the value of £2,000, and handed the money to the stranger.

"The latter ascertained that the amount was correct, and placed it inside his breast pocket.

"'And the watchword?' demanded Mr. Maxwell.

"'Do right and interfere not!' replied the burglar's confederate, with an assumption of dignity, and strode out of the office with all the grandeur of a Spanish hidalgo.

"'Do right and interfere not!' joyfully exclaimed Mr. Maxwell through the telephone. 'And, now you'll leave my premises, Mr. Odell, won't you? And as for my wife——'

"'Have no fear, Mr. Maxwell,' replied the man at the other end, 'you have to deal with a burglar and a gentleman.'

"Mr. Maxwell locked his office, and entering a hansom, galloped to his residence. The more closely he approached the keener his fear of a catastrophe became. But as he stopped at the gate he noticed nothing out of the way. He sprang up the stairs, and entered the pretty boudoir of his prettier wife. She was quietly reading.

She was quietly reading.

"'How you must have suffered, my angel!' he cried, and a sob shook his voice.

"The young wife looked up, astonished.

"'Suffered? I?'

"'That burglar, you know—it must have been awful. Oh, you poor darling!'

"'Why, George dear, what is the matter? You speak in riddles.'

"'But didn't he gag you?' he asked.

"'Now, my dear George, I wish you would talk sense. What do you mean?'

"After Mr. Maxwell has finished the recital of his adventure, he asked:

"'Wasn't there somebody here using my telephone?'

"'Why, yes, there was,' replied Mrs. Maxwell, 'a young and well-dressed man came in, introduced himself to me as Mr. Thomas Odell, a speculator and business friend of yours, and requested permission to make use of your private telephone to send you a most important message on business. Of course I gave him permission. He used the telephone but a short time, and then came back into the drawing-room, thanked me for the favour I had done him, and went away, saying that the telephone was a most useful and admirable invention, it facilitated business so much.'

"'And that was all?' queried Mr. Maxwell; 'he didn't gag you and the servants? He was alone, and did not offer violence to you?'

"'Not at all. He was most polite and gentlemanly, quite as much as you are at this moment, George.'

"'Great Scott!' exclaimed Maxwell with a wild outburst, 'how gigantically I've been sold. Excuse me, dear, but I can't help it. I'll drive over and interview the police.'

"And that's what he did," concluded the detective, "and that's the way I came in possession of the facts. In spite of all our efforts since we've heard nothing more of the £2,000, nor of Mr. Thomas Odell and his confederate."

H. LEGGETT.

TO TELL the CHARACTER from HANDWRITING

THE services of a famous graphologist have been retained for the benefit of the readers of S.S. The inquisitive should send a specimen of their handwriting upon an unruled sheet of notepaper and signed with their customary signature and full address. With this should be inclosed six stamps and a stamped and addressed envelope. All letters should be marked "Graphologist," and forwarded to *Pearson's Weekly* Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

A CONTINENTAL TOUR FOR £2.

As the holiday season has now arrived, special arrangements have been made with Messrs. Thomas Cook and Son for a three days' tour on the Continent. The itinerary which has been mapped out is this: London, Harwich, Antwerp, Brussels, and back, including a visit to the field of the battle of Waterloo. The entire trip will cost £2 a head. All applications for tickets must be made to this office, stating the date for which they are required and inclosing £2 in postal orders.

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A Miner's Luck-penny.

A Story of the Australian Goldfields.

1872.

It is Saturday night on an Australian goldfield. The bar of the "Jolly Diggers" is crowded.

News has gone abroad that "Dog" Kellarey has broken out again, and as he always takes care to have his little bouts remembered, a crowd soon collects.

On this particular Saturday he has set himself to try conclusions with "Kangaroo Jack" of the Midas Claim. It is a gorgeous struggle—even old "Wall-Eyed Bill," who is exacting in such matters, is compelled to admit that. They fight anyhow and everywhere, under tables and over chairs—while the lamps flare, and the dogs bark, and the crowd expresses its admiration in language full of picturesque detail.

"Kangaroo Jack" tires after the twenty-sixth round, and his friends carry him to his tent minus one eye and plus concussion of the brain.

Then when "Dog" Kellarey counts his broken fingers every one suddenly remembers the unguarded condition of his tent and vanishes in the darkness not to reappear until the sound of the coach-horn is heard on Portugee Hill.

The arrival of the weekly coach, bearing Her Majesty's mails, is an occasion of great importance, and ranks even before New Finds or Warden's decisions.

About eleven o'clock the coach creaks and groans up the street to pull up before the flaming lights of the "Jolly Diggers." It is a curious, lumbering old construction, riding on leather springs, and drawn by five strong horses—a sort of badly brought up cross between an antique mourning coach and a dilapidated Indian ghari.

The driver, to whom is intrusted the lives of the half-dozen passengers, travels the 240 miles between the gold fields and civilisation twice weekly, and is always preternaturally thirsty. Custom, however, forbids his leaving his box before he has seen his horses unharnessed and led away, and exchanged the usual pleasantries with his own particular admirers. When in due time he does descend, passengers, diggers, loafers, and dogs escort him into the hotel, and in half-an-hour the excitement is over.

On this occasion, however, it is destined to last longer; "Dog" Kellarey, advancing, invites the driver to take refreshment.

After complying with the request, that individual gets out to the vehicle, to return with a bundle. Then, unwrapping the shawls, he places on the table a baby girl. She cannot be more than two years old, and is fast asleep, her little head and its pretty curls pillowed on one of her tiny arms.

Every one presses round to look, with the exception of "Dog" Kellarey, who has no curiosity in the matter of babies. Then questions pour in thick and fast: "Whose is it?" "Where'd ye get the kiddy, matey?" "Whose youngster is it, Bill?" etc., etc.

Any other man would be bewildered—not so Bill Burns. He says slowly and solemnly, as if aware of his unique importance: "For 'Dog' Kellarey!"

"What!" shouts that gentleman, "that's a lie, you Bill! Who says the kid's for me?"

"I do," replies the driver. "Paul Waites of Wild Dog shoved it aboard, along with its duds, for yer. The little 'un's father pegged out on Saturday—'Flash Dick' of Wild Dog Creek. 'Is last word was: 'Sen' the kid to my old mate, "Dog" Kellarey,' an' so I fetched it along, and the passengers made up the fare among 'em, so there's nothin' to pay—there!"

"Old Dick pegged out!" the "Dog" mumbles slowly, "old Dick pegged out, an' sent 'is kid to me!"

The crowd is so tickled with the idea that it ventures upon a laugh.

The laugh decides him, and stepping up alongside the sleeping child, he sings out: "The kid's mine, an' the man as laughs agin 'er laughs agin me. Now let's see 'im as is game to grin!"

He has evidently gone home, for no one answers.

* * * * *

Sunday morning, and "Dog" Kellarey's claim is the centre of attraction. The little arrival of the previous night plays about the tent door. The "Dog," fearing harm to her from this crowd of visitors, carefully defines his boundary, and threatens dire penalties on the head of any man who crosses it.

* * * * *

News, news!—great and glorious news!

News which runs like wildfire through the field, which flies from tent to tent, from the police cells on the hill to Dutch Joe's across the flat, past the Eureka, down to the Day-dawn, never stopping until everyone has heard it.

"Dog" Kellarey's proverbial bad luck has turned at last—he had bottomed on the lead, the new claim has turned up trumps with a vengeance.

It is full of gold-specks, specimens, and nuggets. Not nuggets as small as peas, but large as walnuts. Not here and there, but in a big deep lead, a fortune at every drive of the pick.

The Luck-penny, who has been sleeping in the shadow

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of the tent, watches and chuckles at a piece of glittering mica. In his excitement the "Dog" sings out:

"Boys! 'tis 'er 'as done it; there's the lass that brought me luck!"

* * * * *

Three p.m. More excitement.

A nugget weighing five pounds! The monster of the field, a wonder of the country, and a fortune to its finder.

Picks and shovels are thrown down, the roar of cradles and sluice boxes stops as if by magic, and the excited crowd starts at a run for the claim.

On their arrival "Dog" Kellarey says nothing, but the second time he carefully points out the boundary. He places his revolver on the cradle ready to his hand, and, bless you, the crowd understands what he means by that.

The Luck-penny sucks her thumb and crows contentedly; womanlike, she knows she is the centre of attraction.

When the last visitor has departed the "Dog" picks her up, and says emphatically:

"Kinchin! It's you as brought the luck to the old man. Now, look here, three parts of that claim belongs to you, it does!"

And he meant it.

1892.

A bright, fresh morning, with a few white clouds scattered about the heavens, the better to enhance the blueness of the sky beyond. A happy spring breeze dashing round corners, and playing the very mischief with silk hats and dainty skirts, whistling through telegraph wires, and covering the harbour with a coating of continuous white foam. A morning on which to feel thankful for existence.

It is easily seen that something unusual is affecting the inhabitants of Potts Point, that fashionable suburb of luxurious Sydney.

At St. Mary's Church door I find a large crowd assembled, representing all ranks of society, and, for the first time, obtain some dim idea of the event I am about to witness. In order to make doubly sure I question an ancient lady, whose dress suggests connection with some charitable institution.

At first she seemed inclined to treat my thirst for information with contempt, but finally a desire for gossip overcomes her reticence, and she condescends to tell me, all in one breath, that "This 'ere is to be the weddin' o' Miss Athelwood; not but that 'er name ain't Athelwood, but Kellarey. 'Er as 'dow'd the alms'ouses down the street, which, times bein' bad, and a lone widder, as 'ad no 'usband an' whose son is doin' 'is last stretch, bein' as innocent as a babe unborn. An' rheumatiz' bein' that bad, she could cry, only she wouldn't. And Miss O'Sullivan, as lives in No. 9, said as 'ow Miss Athelwood was worth well nigh 'alf a million of money if she was worth a penny, not but what she shouldn't be, seein' as 'ow she was born on the gold diggings' and every one knowed them was good times. And a prettier and better lady never stepped, beggin' 'er pardon for sayin' so."

The old woman, once started, was hard to stop. But I was interested in Miss Athelwood, so ventured an inquiry as to her parentage.

"Ah, well may yer say that; not but what yer mightn't understand, seein' as 'ow ye're a stranger in these parts. The poor, young dear never 'ad no father to know but Mr. Athelwood, the lawyer. I 'eard tell she were just fetched up from them goldfields by a feller called Kellarey—a miner chap, who give 'er to Mr. Athelwood along of a fortune which 'e said was 'ers. That's twenty year or more now—the same year as my good man was took by the perlice fer the Orange bushrangin' case, an, 'im not never so much as 'avin' a 'alfpenny of the money, but——"

I stopped the dear old lady's family history by asking whom Miss Athelwood was about to marry. As I put the question, an old and villainously dirty swagman placed his roll of blankets down at the church door and pushed his way towards us.

"In beggin' yer pardon," my lady went on, "Miss Athelwood's a-goin' to marry, as it's not in my mind to remember—a dook, or a hearl, but I can't say which on 'em. Haide-de-camp to the Governor they do say 'e is. But look! look! 'ere they comes!"

Carriage after carriage rolled up to the church door, and set down its load of fashionables. Then, amidst continuous cheering, Mr. and Miss Athelwood arrived. She looked surpassingly beautiful, and I noticed that the old swagman was so overcome with astonishment that he kept his eyes staring at the door long after she had passed through it and we had rushed into the church to see the ceremony.

My whole attention was devoted to watching the bride. I could not drive her romance out of my head. She went up the aisle a homeless girl, the product of a goldfield, and returned, to the music of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," a Countess and a member of one of the oldest families in England.

After all the carriages had rolled away and I was turning to go, the old swagman touched my arm, saying:

"Mister! I'm goin' to get yer to do me a favour!"

Asking him what it was, he replied:

"Let's go somewhere out of this, where we're alone, an' I'll tell yer!"

When we had adjourned to a more fitting place my companion spoke:

"I fancy you'd call me a liar if I told you that I was the man who brought up that girl as we've just see married? But I am—I'm 'Dog' Kellarey, sure enough, 'im as give 'er into Lawyer Athelwood's 'ands twenty year ago, with 'er share of the mine that panned out so rich."

"Why don't you go to her, then? I hear she's been hunting high and low for you."

"That's just it; I know she has. But d'yer think I'm a-goin' into the company o' the likes o' 'er friends. Not me; I'd be making a fool o' the girl, and she'd be ashamed o' 'erself. No; I've tramped close on 400 miles to see 'er married, and now I'm a-goin' back into the Bush to-night for good, I want you to write this 'ere in a letter for me, it ain't much. Say, 'From "Dog" Kellarey to 'is Luck-penny on 'er weddin' day,' and put in the corner, 'I ain't forgot yer, mind!'"

I wrote as he directed, and inclosed—what do you think? A baby's little woollen shoe. The old man had kept this relic as his sacred treasure for twenty years.

Arnold Rees.

In the issue of SHORT STORIES dated May 23rd will appear the opening chapters of a new serial story, entitled,

"THE WYTHECOMBE MYSTERY."

By Mr. JOHN K. LEYS, Author of "The Tenth of June," "The Lindsays," etc., etc.

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The Brain Gymnasium

NEW SERIES.

TWO PRIZES OF A GUINEA EACH.

BELOW we publish ten problems, forming the first of a new series of The Brain Gymnasium. Two prizes of a Guinea each will be awarded every week to those competitors who answer correctly the greatest number of these problems.

Consolation Prizes will be awarded at the discretion of the Editor.

Competitors, in sending in their attempts, must observe the following conditions:

1. All solutions to be written clearly on one sheet of paper.
2. Do not write the questions; simply put the numbers and the answer against each.
3. Each set of attempts to contain the £100 coupon (found on the second page of cover) for the current week.
4. All attempts to be in by Monday, May 11th. Those received after this date will not be dealt with.
5. Mark your envelope "Gymnasium."

☞ It is improbable that you will be able to solve all the problems set, but send in as many as you can do. Those who solve *the greatest number* receive the prizes.

(1.) The following disjointed words, when placed in correct order, form a sentence to be found in a recent number of *Pearson's Weekly*. The punctuation marks are placed in their correct relative positions:

It will be every rate of speed that require and at high travelling then the sixty four signals an express engine passed travels at an miles will rate often an attention. can be constant understood train readily and hour, minutes, that of

(2.) By substituting a new letter for one already in the word, make a new word, and thus progress from word to word until the transformation is complete. The order of the letters may *in no way be altered throughout*. The number of moves in which the alteration is made should be placed against each, and those who succeed in transforming the following words in the fewest moves will be counted correct:

Example: *Rash* to *calm*. Rash—cash—cask—calk—calm. 4 moves.

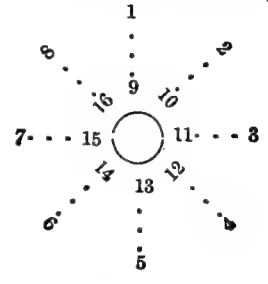
Transform:

(*a*) Cap to low.
(*b*) Slow to fast.
(*c*) Sword to rifle.
(*d*) Pound to penny.
(*e*) Careful to tatters.

(3.) The initials of the words defined below—each of which consists of four letters—form the name of a place marked on every map of the globe.

(*a*) A number under 20.
(*b*) To yield.
(*c*) The cry of a lion.
(*d*) A river of England.
(*e*) Not soft.
(*f*) Taken for medicinal purposes.
(*g*) To unseal.
(*h*) A part of the body.
(*i*) To acquire by service.

(4.) Each of the words defined below consists of five letters. Place them according to the instructions given:



From 1 to 9, gaiety.
" 2 to 10, a country in Asia.
" 3 to 11, a runner.
" 4 to 12, to change.
" 5 to 13, a Scriptural name, occurring in 1st Chron., Chap. V.
" 6 to 14, water pitchers.
" 7 to 15, a famous French astronomer.
" 8 to 16, confederation.

The initial letters forming the perimeter of wheel (from 1 to 8 *via* 2) spell the name of a distinguished French statesman born March 9th, 1749.

The finals forming the hub of wheel (9 to 16 *via* 10) spell the name of a distinguished American statesman born in 1773.

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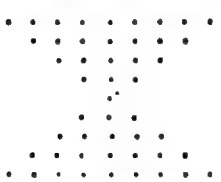
(5.) Assuming that a=5, b=10, e=15, i=20, o=25, t=26, and u=30, what word on this page is of the greatest numerical value, and what is that value? Hyphenated words to count as two:

Example: *Hyphenated* =61., made up as follows:

(*e*) = 15
(*a*) = 5
(*t*) = 26
(*e*) = 15.

61

(6.) Hour Glass.



Each of the dots given above represents a letter. Place the words defined below in the order in which they are given, and when written one under the other they will form a shape similar to the example.

1. Parsons. 2. The human race. 3. On every dinner-table. 4. A poem. 5. In hour glass. 6. A feminine name. 7. A beverage. 8. A scamp. 9. Speaking indistinctly.

The central letters, when read downwards, spell a word which means "to run away precipitately."

(7.) What single word on this page has the greatest number of different meanings? And what are they?

Example: *Page*, a boy attendant, one side of a leaf of a book, to number pages, etc.

(8.) Charade.

My first is a complaint indigenous to our climate.
My second is a running body of water.
My whole is the name of a British regiment.

(9.) Word Squares of Four Letters.

(*a*) Smart; a flower; surrounded by water; to come in contact with.
(*b*) Sullen; doctrine; a constellation; to infer.

(10.) Commence at the word in capitals, and, moving across the squares in the same way as a knight moves on the chessboard, connect up the words given below so that they form a verse of rhyme.

Golden	not	As	my	Why	Oh!	shakes	folded
chances	stay	Hair,	do	she	lady's	averted	stumbled,
keep	Lady	rose-bud's	that	as	her	lips,	her
tips	it	"DEAR	eyes:	am	mist	I	glances?
my	a	me	other	shrouds	Still	head	Tell
how	from	face	humbled!	Golden	I	Why	where
frowning	Tell	I	how	Tell	lady	me	there
fell	see	grace,	fair?	how	flies	me	disfavour

RESULT OF PICTURE PUZZLE COMPETITION.

Below will be found the names of the winners in the Picture Puzzle Competition announced in *Short Stories*, dated April 4th. In view of the small number of persons who have solved the problem under the conditions, it has been considered advisable to divide the prize amongst them, after adding 4s., with the result that each receives 17s.

Gold-plated pencil-cases have been sent to all those competitors who succeeded in putting the puzzle together within one square of being correct.

Mrs. G. Archer, 5, South Terrace, Bury Street, Lower Edmonton.

A. Hook, 9, Canterbury Place, Lambeth Road, S.E.

T. W. Garbutt, 35, Bright Street, Darlington.

H. Broadbent, 18, Finborough Road, South Kensington.

W. Simmonds, 16, Stockwell Street, Greenwich.

J. Cross, 34, Bentley Road, Kingsland Road, N.

C. Wilkins, 2, Claremont Villas, Tudor Road, Kingston Hill.

H. Cheeseright, 40, Granby Street, Liverpool.

T. S. Nunn, 10, Grecian Road, Tunbridge Wells.

C. G. Nancarrow, 267, Somers Road, North Fratton, Portsmouth.

H. Anderson, Naval Ordnance Office, Woolwich Arsenal.

G. T. Somerville, 17A, Great George Street, Westminster.

Here is the key:

23	11	86	16	84	22	10	88
17	74	64	12	43	24	49	53
27	37	58	35	87	81	66	1
69	39	57	78	12	36	29	76
41	63	55	14	3	47	62	82
85	8	6	9	15	4	83	34
42	28	79	44	13	56	52	2
72	75	51	30	61	7	59	32
88	20	48	45	65	71	50	60
26	25	5	91	18	31	54	40
70	73	77	19	33	68	79	80

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DRAWN BY LOT.

THE thirty-eight of us were confined in a large room, and it was the fourteenth day after the Spanish gunboat captured our little steamer before we received a hint of what fate had in store for us. Then an officer entered, called on us to pay strict attention, and announced that we were to be taken out and shot on the morrow. An hour later he returned to explain that he was mistaken. The gracious and merciful Spanish Government would be satisfied with six lives instead of thirty-eight. We had killed six of the crew of the gunboat, and it was to be a life for a life.

"Gentlemen, it will be by lot, of course," he continued, as he bowed and smiled on every hand, "and I am here to oversee the drawing. See! I have here thirty-two white beans and six black ones. I will put them in a cap, and each gentleman will step up and draw as his name is called.

When he had announced that all were to be shot I heard no lamenting. On the contrary, men moved about saying that it was what we had been expecting, and that we would die like men. Lips were compressed, but I did not see one pale face. This new announcement created something like a panic. Only six were to die. Thirty-two would be sent to prison, but all of them would live to see home and friends again. In sixty seconds the face of every man was ghastly. In two minutes all were trembling. Mild-eyed men glared about them like wild beasts driven to bay, and there were lips which bled from the hard-set teeth.

"Gentlemen, my clerk will call the roll, and you will draw the beans," said the officer as he made ready. "Each man must show his bean as he draws, and those who draw black ones must stand over by the windows. Now then, are you ready?"

The clerk could speak and write English, and he had our names in alphabetical order. The first name called was that of Anson, and he hesitated a few seconds before advancing. Did anyone hope he would draw a black bean? I believe that every man of us hoped so. It would better our own chances. The man walked slowly forward, made a great effort to control himself, and made his draw. It was a white bean.

Anderson came next, and he drew his death-warrant as did also Bagley. Then twelve men drew white beans in succession. When it came to my turn, there were two blacks and thirteen whites still left in the cap. I drew a black. That fact did not shock me, as I had almost expected my ill luck from the start, but it hurt me when the men almost applauded. Only one to thirteen now!

It was a singular fate which left that last black bean in the hat Thirteen names were called off, and thirteen men stepped up and drew, and each and all drew white. It was the death warrant of the only man who did not put his hand in the cap. As soon as the drawing was over the thirty-two fortunates shook hands and congratulated each other, and smiled, and laughed. That was only natural. After the first ebullition of feeling, they turned to give us their heartfelt sympathies. We were not removed from the room. They would come for us soon after daylight.

What were our feelings? The first sensation was that of a man coming to after a fall which had deprived him of consciousness for a minute. The next was to doubt if we had not been asleep and dreamed it all. After that one man sat down in a corner and wept. A second lay at full length on the floor with his face to the wall. A third cursed and inveighed and hoped for vengeance. Within three or four hours there came a feeling of exultation. I believe that every man who goes to the gallows has that same feeling. I was still sleeping when the soldiers came to march the six of us out to the execution ground. We shook hands all round, but only here and there did one of the men trust his voice to speak to us. Those who were to live seemed most affected. Their faces were very pale, and their lips quivered.

Two by two, with soldiers on every side, we walked with heads up, but had no word for each other. There were scores of citizens out to see us, but we kept our eyes to the front. Halt! We have reached the grounds. I had thought of the six of us standing in front of six new-made graves, but there were neither graves nor coffins. They stood us with our backs towards a brick wall, and we knew it had been made for just such occasions as this.

"Gentlemen, your eyes—the blindfold!" said an officer as he came forward with several men behind him.

The last thing I saw was a platoon of twenty-four men forming up in front of us—four to a man. For perhaps ten seconds I shrank at the thought of the bullets striking me. For perhaps ten more I prayed that they would make sure work of it. My hands touched the hands of the men each side of me, for we were not bound. I said "good-bye" to each, and they returned it, and I heard the others speaking a last farewell word. I heard the last man walk away when the last victim had been blinded. I heard the platoon moving up nearer. I heard one street boy shouting to another that the soldiers were about to fire. There was deep silence for a few seconds, and then I heard advancing footsteps. Some one seized my arm, and I was led away to the right and the handkerchief removed. It was the officer again, and he turned me over to two soldiers with the remark:

"He is but a boy, and the Governor commutes. Take him back to prison."

I had not gone 200 feet when there was a crash of musketry, and my five comrades lay dead at the base of the wall. Was I rejoiced? Strangely enough, no—not for hours and hours. I had been so near death that I was dead to myself and all around me.

S. L.

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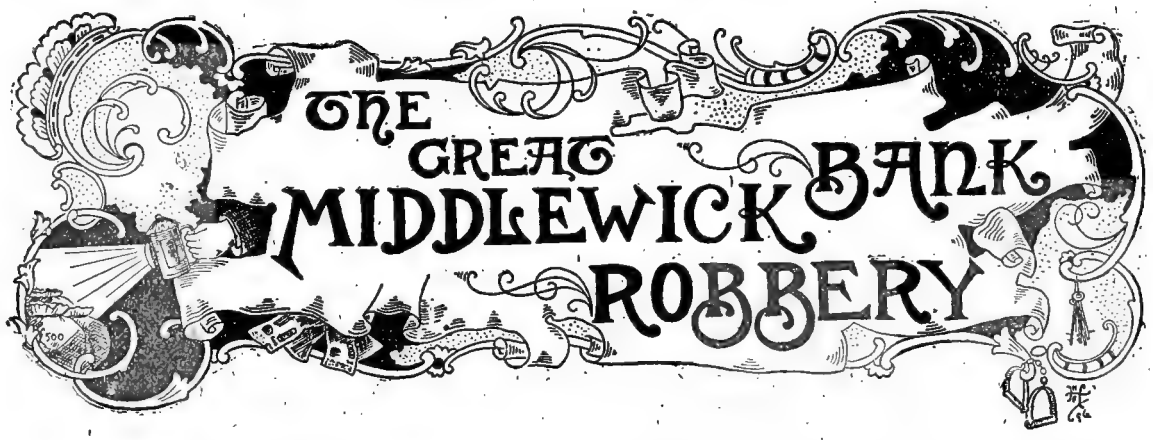

CHAPTER XVII.

The Escape.

Meanwhile, how was the detective getting along?

It was useless for him to lament his foolhardiness or regret the step that had brought this peril upon him. He was caught in the worst predicament of his life, and the question that confronted him was what could he do to help himself?

He paused at the bottom of the stairs and stood motionless until he heard the bolt slid into place. Then he listened to the murmur of voices, but could not distinguish what was said. It mattered not, for he felt no further interest in the conversation.

Drawing a match from the little silver box he always carried in his pocket, he struck it and began an exploration of his prison.

Several matches sufficed to make him as thoroughly acquainted with its interior as if it had been brilliantly lighted. He was surrounded by four thick stone walls, so compactly cemented that the cellar was as if hewn out of the solid rock.

The floor was of earth, quite hard, but susceptible to his pocket-knife. To tunnel under the walls and to the surface outside, however, would require days, and possibly weeks of unremitting work. He would perish with thirst and starvation meanwhile, for it was not to be supposed that his captors meant to furnish him with water and food. So that idea had to be abandoned.

The smallness of the two windows rendered them equally unavailable. It struck him as strange that the cellar contained no other entrance than the one he had used. Everything that had ever entered or been carried out of it was by means of the door at the top of the stairs.

Wishing to economise his supply of matches, which numbered hardly a dozen, he devoted half-an-hour to fingering the walls in different places in the hope of finding some loose stones that might be further displaced. Nothing of the kind presented itself.

He half suspected that when Roberts was left alone upstairs he would carry out his threat against him. The detective, therefore, fought shy of the foot of the steps, and held himself in readiness to retreat if the man appeared. He meant to compel Roberts to enter the cellar to complete his work, and in that event there was no saying what might occur.

Taylor was too active both in mind and body to remain idle; all he was waiting for was to discover the best means of helping himself. The subterranean prison contained absolutely nothing at all, not so much even as a log on which he could rest. In places the ceiling was so low that he was compelled to stoop slightly to avoid hitting his head against the cross beams. By standing up straight he could easily press the palms of his hands against the heavy boards which formed the floor, supported on the beams.

This fact decided his course of procedure.

Several more of the precious matches were used to help him examine the roof of the cellar. It may be said of the men who put together this old structure that they builded better than they knew. Here were the floors, and many portions as strong as on the day the edifice was completed.

Taylor determined to cut his way through the floor overhead to one of the rooms above. If he could do that and climb out of the cellar, he was ready to take his chance of escaping.

It need not be said that he selected the corner furthest from where the men were holding their council. The cellar did not extend under the kitchen, but reached to the front of the house. It was there the prisoner decided to begin his work.

The task was a most formidable one, for the only instrument at his command was his pocket-knife, whose sharp blades were so delicate that the utmost care was necessary to prevent their breakage while working in the dark. If it should prove that the boards composing the floor were dovetailed into each other, the difficulty of his task would be increased almost immeasurably.

But minutes were valuable, and Taylor had none to throw away. He had fixed the point where he meant to begin operations so clearly in his mind that it was continually before him, though working in the dark.

Using his left hand as a help to guide him, he began cutting the wood at right angles to the grain. It was easy to decide how large a space was needed to permit the passage of his body, and he set to work to open such a passage. It was fearfully slow work. The wood was oak, and had been seasoned by a century of use. It would take hours to cut through any portion of it, but it was far better to keep busy than to sit down and fold his hands in despair.

Taylor knew he was progressing, though it was exasperatingly slow work. The unusual position of his arm, all the while extended above his head, and the continuous pressure and movement of the fingers, after a time brought so great a fatigue to arm and hand that he was obliged to rest. In a few minutes, however, he was at it again, and thus the work went on through the long lonely hours of the night.

No one, unless similarly placed, can understand the tediousness and trying nature of the task. After a time Taylor's right shoulder began aching, and caused such intense pain that he shifted the knife to his left hand, in the hope of obtaining relief without losing time. But the detective was not ambidextrous, and to his dismay the first effort snapped the blade in two.

"Heavens!" he muttered, "that ruins everything."

He stood for a minute bathed in perspiration, though the

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cellar was chilly at that hour. But the despair in his heart quickly vanished, when he recalled that the knife contained two other blades, though one of them was the small file meant for the finger-nails, but which is generally more ornamental than useful.

Besides, more than half of the broken blade remained. The abrupt angle made by the fracture caused this to be tenfold more effective. Forgetting his aching shoulder, he applied the piece of steel with such vigour that he accomplished more in the next half hour than he had in double that time before the accident.

"It would have paid me to have begun by breaking all the blades," was his thought, though he did not adopt the method with either of the remaining ones.

At last, however, the hour came when he had to stop operations for a longer time than usual. He sat down on the damp floor, with his back against the wall, so tired that, after the aching in his shoulder had passed off, he imitated the man overhead—and went to sleep.

He opened his eyes after Roberts had departed. The cellar was filled with a faint light, caused by the sun's rays entering the small windows. Taylor started up at the thought that if Roberts had known of his unconsciousness he could have descended the steps and carried out his purpose again. However, nothing of the sort had been done, and it was useless to think of it.

As the detective scrambled to his feet and stretched his limbs he became aware of two uncomfortable facts, he was exceedingly hungry and thirsty. Inasmuch as nothing in the way of food or drink had been offered him, it was evident he was to be left to perish by one of the most miserable and lingering of deaths.

But that release could not come for several days, no matter how intense the suffering. Meanwhile he must work, work, work. And work he did, plying the knife till he could no longer hold it.

When the growing dimness of the light in the cellar, and a glance at his watch, told him that the day was drawing to a close, and the second night was near him, the task was not finished, though much progress had been made.

The prisoner had cut a deep gutter on the four sides of a square about a foot and a half in diameter. Around this hollow the knife had travelled again and again, eating a little further on each circuit, until he began to hope he had nearly penetrated the thickness of the boards in several places. He ceased cutting at one end, giving all his efforts to the other three sides. When they gave way it would be easy to snap off the remaining portion.

But night descended, and he was still at it. Every possible incentive urged him on. He knew the crisis at the Bank had come and gone long before. Jack Burton must be puzzled and alarmed over his absence, but could never dream of its explanation, and so was powerless to help him.

He was almost faint for want of food, but the only means of obtaining relief was by cutting his way out of his prison. He must keep at it, or die a lingering death.

More than once he thought of attacking the door, but that was considerably thicker than the floor before he began cutting it. Besides, he suspected that Roberts was waiting for such a pretext for firing upon him. No, he had hit upon the one and only course.

Finally, the wearied officer closed his knife and replaced it in his pocket. Then he put both hands against the square space inclosed by the deep furrow made by his knife, steadied himself and pushed upwards with all his might. The whole piece yielded as though it were an egg shell. A similar effort two hours before would have accomplished the same result.

With a thrill of hope the detective grasped the edges of the opening with both hands and drew himself through. Had he been sure of landing right among the four burglars he would hardly have hesitated. His prison had become so hateful that he felt he would have gone mad had he stayed longer in it.

The occasion warranted the use of one of the two remaining matches. His listening ear caught no evidence that his gaoler had heard or suspected what was done, so he did not fear to draw the match along the hard floor and look round him.

He had entered the large room which years before served as the parlour of the old stone house. Neither on the mildewed walls nor anywhere about the rooms was there any sign of pictures or furniture. For generations it had been deserted and bereft of everything except the wide, gaping fireplace, and the traces of what once had been.

Taylor moved quickly and softly across the floor to the door that led into the hall where he was playing the eavesdropper at the time of his capture. It opened readily, as did the outer door.

Within three minutes after he climbed through the opening in the roof of the cellar, he was in the fresh, glorious air outside. Happy, thankful, hopeful; but half mad with thirst and starvation.

Quickly he hastened down the road, and then, when satisfied that no one was observing him, he hurried to the clear little stream winding through the hollow, knelt down, and there quenched his thirst.

"I wonder whether there are enough provisions in Middlewick to give me the supper I want?" was his next thought, as he strode rapidly towards the town.

He was confident that disaster had overtaken the criminals, since, from what he knew of the preparations made, he could not well see how it could result otherwise. Besides, the profound stillness within the stone house he had just left was proof that the party had not carried out their scheme of hiding there. There could be but one explanation of this failure.

Like Roberts, who had preceded him, Taylor had not far to go before learning the truth. The attempt against the bank had not only failed, but three of the burglars were securely lodged in the county gaol.

That much learned, a great load was lifted from the detective's mind. He therefore went straight to the hotel, and, though the hour was late, ordered a meal befitting the physical condition of a man who had not tasted food for more than twenty-four hours.

While Jack Burton and Roberts were holding their interesting conversation upstairs, the gentleman into whose apartment they had intruded was coming up the stairs in a very comfortable frame of mind.

"Hulloa!" he said to himself, when he caught the glimmer of light beneath the door, "someone has made a mistake."

In accordance with his habits of caution he stepped softly, pausing in the corridor and listening.

"Hulloa! that's Burton's voice, I'm sure. Who is he talking to?"

A moment's patience and the question was answered.

"Bobby Roberts, as sure as I live. He's deserted his post and come down to my room. What on earth is he talking to Burton about?"

Taylor's position enabled him to catch every word, even though the speakers were talking in unusually low tones. At the crisis of the conversation, he pushed open the door, with the exclamation:

"There is no need of that; here he is."

Nothing could have shown the training of the two friends more strikingly than their course at this crisis.

Burton did not look round at the man whose voice he recognised. He did not forget that the ruffian in front of him was on the alert to seize any advantage the instant it presented itself. In the most matter-of-fact manner, Burton said:

"Alf, take his revolver out of his pocket."

"It will afford me great pleasure to do so. Hulloa! by Jingo! it's my own little beauty," he exclaimed, deftly removing and holding aloft the pistol before Roberts could have prevented, had he dared to do so.

"So you are here?" remarked the scamp, with a smile,

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looking in the face of his former prisoner; "we were just going after you."

"That doesn't seem necessary now," observed Burton, "but I gathered from what you said, Mr. Roberts, that my friend Alf had been wounded. I do not observe anything amiss with him."

"That was only a little joke of mine. I wouldn't have hurt such a courageous man for the world. I meant to excite your fears and then make you happy by showing how well we had treated your friend."

"If *he* had had his way," said Taylor, "he would have used his pistol on me long ago. But, Phil, what are you going to do with this gentleman? I don't want him in my room all night."

"We'll deliver him to the authorities, and let him join his friends in gaol."

Under the guard and custody of Burton and Taylor, Roberts was speedily lodged in as secure confinement as were those of his confederates who had preceded him to imprisonment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Miss Denton Asks a Few Questions.

Jack Burton and Alfred Taylor had too much to discuss after delivering their prisoner to the authorities to think of retiring for a long time. In the first place Taylor gave a minute account of all that had befallen him after his disappearance on the preceding evening. Burton listened without a question, but indulged in a smile at some of the grotesque features of his friend's experience. He uttered no word of reproach. It was not his habit to do that, for everyone is liable to make a mistake.

It took Burton a shorter time to relate all that could interest his friend respecting the four men who had been secured.

"Now, as the case stands," he added, "we are back again precisely at the point where we started several days ago."

"In what respect?"

"Think. The episode of the burglars—that is, Nash, King, and Co.—is only a parenthesis in the flow of incidents; it is a side issue—nothing to do with the main question."

Taylor nodded his head.

"You were sent for a few days ago by Mr. Bryant to try to clear up the mystery of the missing thousands. You and I both came. Just as matters were assuming shape, four of our old acquaintances took it into their heads to rob the bank that had just suffered a big loss. 'Twas the oddest coincidence I ever knew, and but for the preceding burglary the quartette would have made a nice haul."

"And not one of the four yet understands how we happened to be in Middlewick at the time of their visit."

"And probably never will; they will all be somewhat older, if not wiser, men than they are to-night when they get out again. But business is business——"

"Which reminds me," interrupted Taylor. "I wonder whether that fellow took away any of my documents."

He made a hasty examination of his portmanteau, but so far as he could ascertain nothing was missing.

"He didn't find what he was looking for," suggested Burton.

"It doesn't look as if he did, though I don't see how anything of mine in the way of papers can help him. But I interrupted you."

"You remember the papers which you brought from Mr. Bryant's house, Alf?"

"Yes; I left them with you."

"I have them," said Burton, drawing the package from an inner pocket, and spreading its contents out on the table.

"They contain a good specimen of the handwriting of Rutherford, the Middlewick Bank book-keeper."

"And also a letter of Mr. Bryant, and the missive that was pushed under the door of the Bank when you and I were sitting in the building. We will make another comparison of them."

"Shall I try it first?"

"If you please. Let me know your conclusion."

"That has already been reached."

"Possibly you may revise it," was Burton's quiet remark, as he leaned back in his chair.

Taylor spent several minutes in carefully studying the several papers, but he did it only to oblige his friend.

"What is your second decision?" asked Burton.

"The same as the first."

"And that is——?"

"I pride myself upon being somewhat of an expert in reading chirography."

"Did you ever know of three experts reaching the same conclusion?"

"I don't understand what you are hinting at," remarked Taylor, taking up the papers again and glancing at them.

"You have not yet fully answered my question as to what your conclusion is."

"I never knew a person who could successfully disguise his handwriting for any length of time. He may work out a few words or sentences that will mislead you, but when it comes to a page of note or foolscap he is sure to betray himself. The person who pushed that letter under the door took every pains to conceal his handiwork, but half way down the page he drops into some mannerisms that betray him. My conclusion is that the same hand that wrote that purposely mis-spelled letter is the same that wrote *this*."

"You feel no doubt on that point?"

"Not the slightest."

"All the same, Alf, *you are wrong*."

"Impossible! You can never make me believe that."

"Oh yes, I shall, and in a few minutes, too. Study that paper in your hand more closely, and you will find that the writer not only attempted to disguise his handwriting, but strove still harder *to make it resemble the writing of someone else*."

"What in the name of goodness would he do that for?"

"He knew the note would pass under the critical eye of such experts as ourselves, and he meant to divert suspicion to an innocent party."

"You must be mistaken, Cairns," exclaimed Taylor, who, without noticing it, dropped into the habit of addressing his friend by the name to which he was more accustomed than that of Jack Burton.

"Let us see," said the latter, drawing his chair closer to the table.

He then proceeded to point out what might with truth be called microscopic evidences of his remarkable declaration. There were plenty of them, and few indeed would have detected what, to Burton, was as plain as day. But if ever there was a marvellous expert at that sort of business, Cairns was the man. Taylor's skill was that of a child compared with it.

He was still engaged at his task when Taylor interrupted.

"Enough! You're right. But heavens, what is the conclusion?"

"I need not name it. If I am right, and you know that I am, only one conclusion is possible."

For a few seconds both were silent; but they understood each other.

"Cairns," said the other, almost in a whisper. "There's another party whom we ought to see."

"Who's that?"

"Old Warren, the watchman, who was discharged and then taken back again. He must have an interesting story to tell if he can only be got to tell it."

"You're right, for he's told it."

"To whom?"

"To me."

"And what is it?"

"That on the night the twenty thousand pounds were taken from the vault of the Middlewick Bank, and previous

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to the visit of the thief, Warren was drugged, though he never suspected it."

"How could that be?"

Burton then told his friend of his visit to the old watchman and what he revealed of the medicine given to him for his rheumatism.

"When I held the empty phial to my nose I detected the odour of laudanum. Perhaps he caught a glimmer of the truth from my manner, but he is too slow of intellect to comprehend the shameful trick that was played on him."

"And he gave you the name of the party."

"He had been cautioned not to do so, and had pledged himself he would not. No bribe or threat could induce him to break his word, but, Alf, it wasn't necessary; I'm glad he didn't tell me his name."

"So am I," was Taylor's reply. "What's the next thing to be done?"

"Go to bed. It's past two o'clock; no need to hurry up in the morning. Good-night."

Back in his own room once more, Jack Burton was soon in bed and fast asleep. Taylor, on the contrary, lay awake a long time, disturbed by torturing meditations over what had taken place within the preceding two or three days, supplemented by the astounding knowledge that had come to him that evening through his friend in the adjoining room. But at last he, too, became unconscious, and he did not wake until the morning was well advanced.

"Alf," said Burton, in his sharp, business-like way when they met again after breakfast in Taylor's room. "Mr. Bryant must have wondered where you were on the night of the burglary. I haven't had time to explain matters to him, and had I had the time I shouldn't have known how to have done so. Hadn't you better call in and see him?"

"What shall I say?"

"I see no objection to your telling the truth. You may not feel very proud while doing so, but you needn't say much about how neatly the tables were turned upon you. Make it appear that you overcame your four enemies single-handed."

"I don't suppose he'd believe me, but still I'll do as you suggest."

"I'm afraid I shan't be here when you come back. It all depends. Before I decide upon what is to be done to-day I must consider matters."

Upon reaching Mr. Bryant's house the detective was told he was out, but expected back every moment. It was his niece, Miss Denton, who made this explanation, and invited the caller inside so cordially that Taylor accepted, and found himself alone with her. With some hesitation she said:

"You will pardon me, Mr. Taylor, but my uncle, who has few secrets from me, has told me your errand in Middlewick. That being the case, and feeling as deeply interested as he in your success, may I ask how you are progressing with your search for the parties who stole the large amount of money some nights ago?"

The visitor was somewhat surprised at this direct question, but he noted the distressed expression of her countenance, and answered:

"Such work, you know, Miss Denton, is very difficult and fails more often than it succeeds."

"I suppose," she remarked, "that it is wrong to feel pity for those who commit such crimes, but it always saddens me to hear of them. There may be so many palliative circumstances of which we can know nothing: a starving family, misfortune, or some sudden overwhelming temptation repented of as soon as yielded to, but not soon enough to save the erring one."

"True, and human judgment being fallible must not be condemned too harshly. It is more often right than wrong, and such as it is, it is the only thing that can make property and life safe."

"Do you think it right," asked the young lady, the flush on her face deepening, "to allow the guilty parties in a case of this kind to escape prosecution?"

"I am not sure I understand you?"

"I am not sure that I understand myself, but what I wish to ask is whether you can conceive of a set of circumstances in which you, as an officer of the law, would recommend that a wrong-doer should not be punished for what he has done?"

"Yes, I can imagine such. Suppose, for instance, the men who took the £20,000 from the Middlewick Bank should voluntarily give it up—why, having made all the restitution in their power, there is morally no crime, though technically they have violated the law."

The detective shook his head.

"Suppose they should offer to surrender a *portion*?"

"You must see, Miss Denton, that in such a case there is a double crime, and the demoralising sin of compounding a felony, as it is called, is committed."

"Is such a course never justifiable?"

"It is hard to conceive such an instance."

"But cannot some good be accomplished?"

"Possibly it might, so far as a single individual is concerned; but evil is encouraged. Those who consent thus to compromise with wickedness are incited by the basest motives, for they not only profit themselves, but help to protect the wrong-doers. No; the most severe punishment should be visited upon those who trifle with right."

The detective's heart ached while uttering these sentiments, for he saw how they agitated the girl to whom he was repeating them. She was a high-spirited, conscientious young lady, but, in common with her sex, her judgment had become warped by her devotion. There was something in the situation which touched her feelings more than anything that she had yet experienced. She looked up abruptly with the question:

"Do you think you will succeed in discovering the persons guilty of this wrong?"

"You must understand that it is impossible to answer that question, except by saying that *I hope* to do so. Your uncle has instructed me to spare neither effort nor expense in the undertaking."

She made no comment on this, and he rose to his feet. His wishes had undergone a change during the brief interview. He no longer desired to meet Mr. Bryant, and fearful that if he remained longer he would do so, he bade the young lady "Good-day" and withdrew.

(To be continued.)

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